YOUR *ESSENTIAL* MONTHLY GUIDE TO THE WORLD OF MANGA AND ANIME!

MANGA MAX™

FACE THE SLAYERS

A date with
Kazuo Yamazaki

PLUS

EASTERN HEROES™

INVASION AMERICA

Kuni Tomita
Interview

DONNIE YEN

The new Big Boss

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January 1999
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So *Perfect Blue* isn't on the cover like we promised, but that's because there wasn't much point running a feature now when the release has been delayed till April/May. We do what we can, but sometimes we have to wing it. As I type this, issue one still hasn't appeared, someone has forgotten to seal the sealed section in the UK, and I haven't got a whelk's clue what's on the cover of issue four. This, my predecessor regularly informs me with a nasty grin, is the way it will always be.

But I don't expect many complaints about us running *Slayers* as our cover feature, except perhaps from those who think we should try not to reflect the tone of English-language releases. The stereotype of anime in the mainstream is, as *SFX* magazine joked recently: "All huge demons and monsters romping about as pre-adolescent schoolchildren struggle to come to terms with the lack of love they receive from their fathers, while constantly trying to stop their younger sister revealing they are, in fact, reincarnations of ancient deities/huge battle-robot pilots/alien androids, and attempting to catch the roving eye of lovely Sasami at school, all the time avoiding the ministrations of wicked bully Yugi..." Nine times out of ten in the Western anime market, they're not wrong.

I think Kazuo Yamazaki makes an interesting point this issue when he talks about the target audience for *Slayers*. As we're always reminding journalists, industry rights-buyers and fans, anime has as many genres and categories as film itself. Just because it's anime, it doesn't follow that it's aimed at the same viewers as *Wings of Honneamise*, or *Fake* or *Overfiend*. We try to reflect what's going on in the East, but also what's going on in the West, which is why we have a lot of pretty girls on the cover, a lot of science fiction, and, incidentally, why the UK review section this month concentrates more on the London Film Festival than on the tiny number of anime releases.

Trust me, it all works out in the end.

Jonathan Clements

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Code Of Honour

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ERRATA
Amidst the many errors in last month's issue, one in particular requires an admission of guilt. CPM's packaging of its Anime 18 label is displayed in such a manner "...which ensures that a parent or video-shop clerk could NOT mistake it as suitable for children or young teens," and not the opposite, as stated in the last issue. We would like to apologise to CPM for any mad panic caused. It is traditional in these situations to sack the offending staffer, but in this case it was the editor himself, and his punishment is to continue in the hellish task of running the magazine.

Cover © Kanzaka/Araizumi/Kadokawa

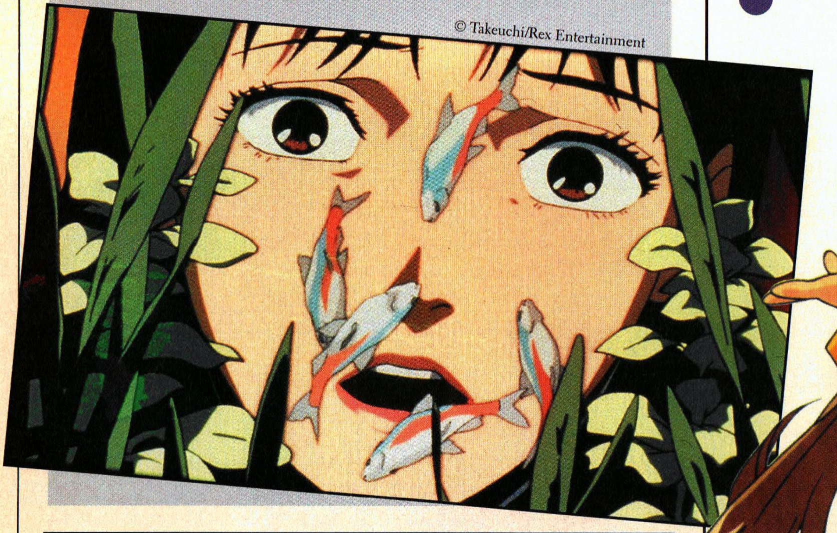
Wired

The NEWS Finder

THE
LOW-DOWN
ON UPCOMING
ANIME, MANGA
ACTION AND
OTHER
WEIRDNESS

BLUE Two?

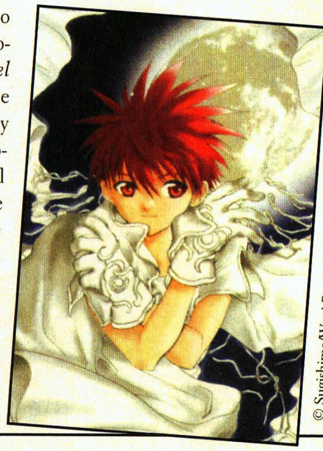
The Western release of *Perfect Blue* is still stuck in turnaround, allegedly because Manga Entertainment are refusing to lock the dub down until it's, well, perfect. In the meantime, original author Yoshikazu Takeuchi has just published a Japanese follow-up. Although not a direct sequel to his earlier book, *Simple Red* features very similar themes: this time the tale of a voice actress who receives improper faxes from an obsessed anime director. Was this all inspired by his experiences of working on *Perfect Blue*? We wonder. ●



© Takeuchi/Rex Entertainment

DARK ANGEL

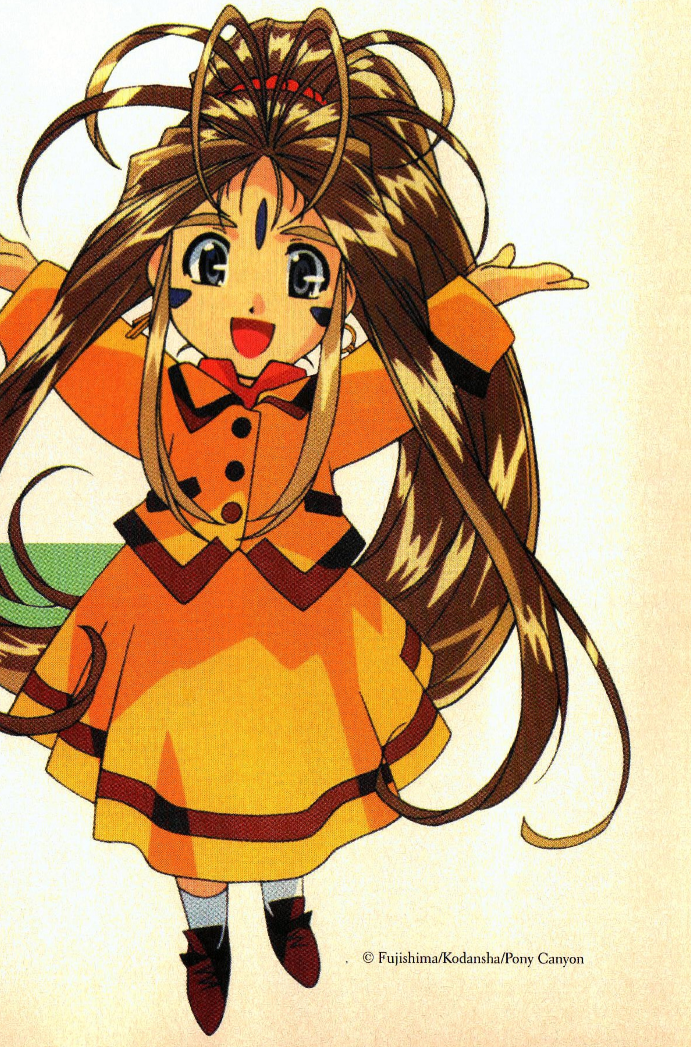
Featuring a 14-year-old schoolkid who can transform at will into Dark, the notorious thief, Yukiru Sugisaki's *DNAngel* has only been running in *Asuka* magazine for a few hundred pages, but has already been rewarded with a radio drama adaptation in Japan. And regular readers will know what that means – once the voice actors have got into their parts and the fan buzz has started, it would have to be a pretty horrendous flop not to get the anime treatment. MM gives it twelve months before the Japanese magazines announce an anime adaptation by "popular demand." ●



© Sugishima/Wani Books/Miya Kotani/Sunrise/Kadokawa

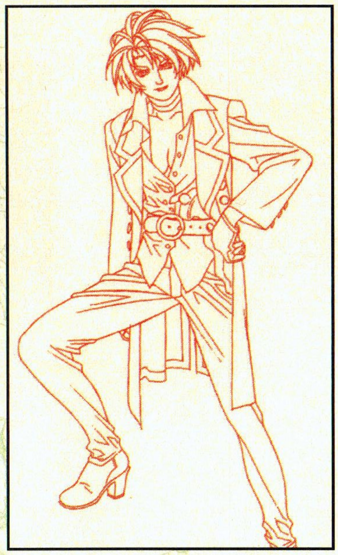
Norn Stars

With a film coming up later in the year, and the comic still selling well in the English language, the *Oh My Goddess* franchise is going from strength to strength. Out now in Japan: *The Adventures of Mini-Goddess*, featuring the squashed-down adventures of Kosuke Fujishima's trio of Nordic divinities. Originally broadcast on Japanese television in compressed bursts, the first batch of mini-mayhem has now been collected on video and laserdisc. The first instalment features eight episodes, including the monster-movie spoof *Giant Monster Kabira*. Also just out in Japan, the *Mini-Goddess* CD-ROM, featuring episodic manga screen-savers and a divine file manager, available from Kodansha for a down-to-earth ¥4700. ●



© Fujishima/Kodansha/Pony Canyon

BODIES & Sol

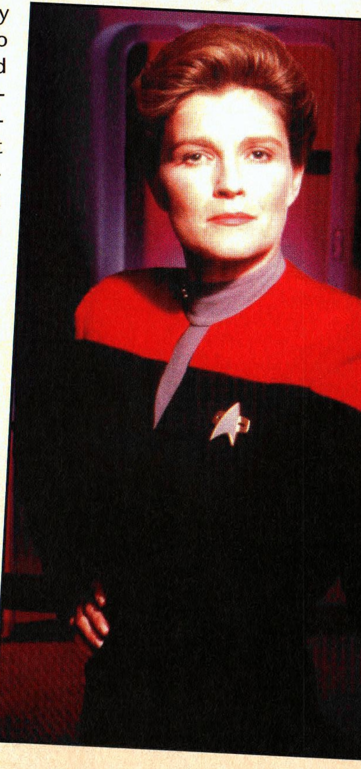


More news in on the new version of the popular science fiction anime *Sol Bianca*. The new series will be directed and storyboarded by *Armitage III*'s Hiroyuki Ochi. Although Ochi is also story editor, the scripts themselves will be written by Hideki Mitsui. Animation supervision is from a veteran of the original *Sol Bianca* staff, Naoyuki Onda. Music is by *El Hazard*'s Seigo Nagaoka.

Production house AIC are rumoured to be borrowing an idea from revisionist experts Lucasfilm, and digitally-enhancing the old episodes so they match the quality of the new ones. It would also appear that the the new series is designed to slot *around* the previous episodes, rather than simply continuing the story. The first part, now slated for release in July 1999, takes place on a vacation planet, where April's prized flintlock pistol is stolen. When the ladies discover the missing pistol is up for auction at a plush orbiting hotel, they head off to get it back. It's only when they disembark that they discover they have a new crewmember, the war-orphan stowaway Meiyo. If this sounds like a bit of a departure from the cliffhanger ending of the 1991 video, don't panic, this is a prequel to explain what an underage girl like Meiyo is doing onboard a pirate ship. *[So what's the minimum age for piracy, then? – Ed.]* MM suspects the "resort" setting could be a sly ruse to get the girls into bikinis. Feb, for one, has taken her demotion from pirate captain badly, and is now seen cavorting in lacy underwear in the new character designs. ●

© AIC, Pioneer

SPOOKY Janeway



Even in Japan, casting real children to play children's roles is rare. There's union rules to worry about, restricting working hours, and the very real possibility that a realistic-sounding voice will be cancelled out by an unrealistic performance. *Evangelion*'s Shinji was not played by a boy in Japan, but by accomplished voice actress Megumi Ogata. But playing juvenile roles is a difficult rut to get out of – if you're too good, you'll never get the chance to act natural, unless of course you're a deep-voiced, commanding lady looking for minions to dominate. Showing now on Japanese television, *Star Trek: Voyager* has been dubbed by the best. Captain Janeway (Kate Mulgrew) is voiced in Japanese by Yoko Matsuoka, an anime veteran whose croaky tones are better known in a large variety of boys' roles, including Werner in the *Story of the von Trapp Family* and the titular *Spooky Kitaro*. Since Mulgrew herself has been known to do the odd bit of cartoon voice-acting (in *Gargoyles* and *Batman*, to name but two), it's interesting to note that the Japanese have found an actress with a similarly-distinctive voice. ●

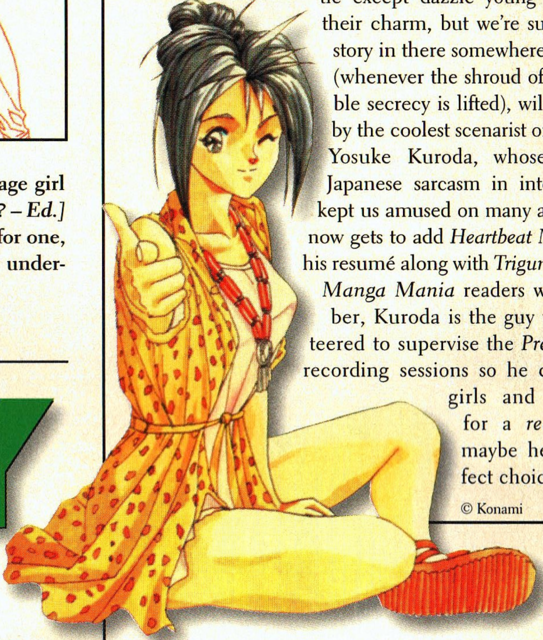
Star Trek: Voyager © Paramount Pictures

Sources this issue

Animage, Steve Kyte, Helen McCarthy, Chrys Mordin, *Newtype*, *Screen*, Toren Smith, Julia Sertori, Jim Swallow

BABE CHARMER

Featuring the original voice-cast from the smash hit dating game, *Heartbeat Memorial* is set to make the jump to video this spring, in a two-part series courtesy of Konami. While the plot is still a "secret" (read into that what you will), the director has been outed as *Fushigi Yugi*'s very own Hajime Kamegaki. He'll have the unenviable task of trying to wrench an anime out of a game which required players to do very little except dazzle young ladies with their charm, but we're sure there's a story in there somewhere. The script (whenever the shroud of impenetrable secrecy is lifted), will be written by the coolest scenarist on the block. Yosuke Kuroda, whose very un-Japanese sarcasm in interviews has kept us amused on many an occasion, now gets to add *Heartbeat Memorial* to his resumé along with *Trigun*. As regular *Manga Mania* readers will remember, Kuroda is the guy who volunteered to supervise the *Pretty Sammy* recording sessions so he could meet girls and schmooze for a *real* job, so maybe he's the perfect choice ●



© Konami

CYBER *Dream* TEAM

The fabled Sega Dreamcast, rival to the N64 and Playstation, is finally out in Japan. "Up till now," Sega's Eiichi Yukawa told *Newtype* magazine, "playing console games has essentially meant playing by yourself, but I think the Dreamcast with its networking capabilities is going to make games even more fun."

As one might expect, there's a standard spread of games. You've got your fighting with *Virtua Fighter 3tb*, your racing with *Monaco Grand Prix 2*, and your fishing with *Get Bass*. And no, we don't know what people see in fishing games either. For *Resident Evil* fans, there's also the forthcoming *Biohazard~Code: Veronica* from Capcom, and mecha-heads can content themselves with *Virtual-On Oratorio Tangram*. But here's a note for anime-watchers – tucked into the bottom of the release list, with no date forthcoming at this time, is *Akihabara Cyber Team Pata Pies* (whatever that is). With such a high-profile platform, could this mean that Yoshitaka Fujimoto's television anime will find itself besieged by anime distributors looking to cash in on the game? There's even a movie version coming in the summer, under the title *Akihabara Cyber Team: Final Chapter – Birth*, so this is a MM tip for an English-language release sooner rather than later. ●

INCOMING MANGA TITLES: FEBRUARY

CPM MANGA

Record of Lodoss War: The Grey Witch #4
Mizuno & Ochi, B&W, 32pp, $2.95/£1.95

Slayers #5
Kanzaka & Araizumi, B&W, 32pp, $2.95/£1.95

Legend of Lemnear #14
Yoshimoto & Urushihara, B&W, 32pp, $2.95/£1.95

CPM MANGA X (ADULT TITLES)

Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend #8
Toshio Maeda, B&W, 32pp, $2.95/£1.95

DARK HORSE

Blade of the Immortal #30 (Dark Shadows Part 2 of 5)
Hiroaki Samura, B&W, 32pp
$2.95/£1.95

Drakuun #23 (The Hidden War Part 5 of 6)
Johji Manabe, B&W, 32pp, $2.95/£1.95

Oh My Goddess: The Devil in Miss Urd #4 (of 6)
Kosuke Fujishima, B&W, 32 pp, $2.95/£1.95
Skuld saves Belldandy from Urd's demonic clone, but then both Urd and her clone start behaving like goody-two shoes – so which one is which?

Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back – Manga #3
Toshiki Kudo, B&W, 96pp, $9.95/£6.95
This delightful reworking of the SF classic continues.

Gunsmith Cats: Bean Bandit #2 (of 9)
Kenichi Sonada, B&W, 32pp, $2.95/£1.95
Bean has accepted Rally's challenge – if she can stop his latest drug run, he'll quit the drugs trade altogether.

Usagi Yojimbo #27 (The Hairpin Murders part 2 of 2)
Stan Sakai, 24pp, B&W, $2.95/£1.95

Blade of the Immortal: Dreamsong GN
Hiroaki Samura, B&W, $12.95/£9.95

Shadow Lady: Dangerous Love #5 (of 7)
Masakazu Katsura, B&W, 24pp, $2.50/£1.65

EROS MANGEROTICA (These titles may not be available in the U.K due to adult content)

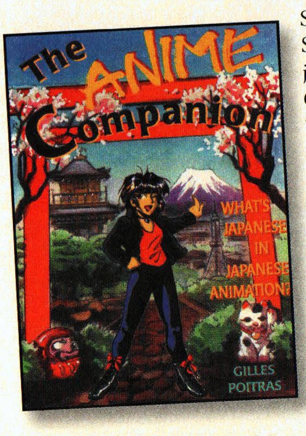
Original Bondage Faeries #4
Kondom, B&W, 24pp, $3.50/£2.30

DVDividends

It's not just a chance to do your impression of Twiki from *Buck Rogers*, DVD is the format anime was born for. It has pin-sharp image quality, avoids the sub versus dub argument once and for all, and it doesn't get caught in your video recorder when it's in a bad mood. In the marginalised UK market it could be a godsend, since the chance to have multiple language tracks means that one disc can be pressed for the entire European market. This could well result in niche titles getting a release, because there will be 350 million potential buyers instead of a paltry 60 million. In the US market, Central Park Media has just announced another slew of DVD releases, including *A Wind Named Amnesia*, *Guardian of Darkness* (previously known as *Takegami*) and *The Heroic Legend of Arslan*. Or in other words, nearly seven hours of footage compressed into an inch and a half of shelf space. Because that's DVD's ultimate benefit – it doesn't take up so much room. ●

From the Director of NINJA SCROLL
A WIND NAMED AMNESIA
DUAL LANGUAGE: ENGLISH & JAPANESE
From the Director of FATAL FURY and BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN
Guardian of Darkness
Takegami: War God
Contains All 3 Volumes
DUAL LANGUAGE: ENGLISH & JAPANESE
DVD VIDEO
m the Scriptwriter of SAILOR MOON
he Heroic Legend of Arslān
Contains 2 Discs Running Time: 4 Hours

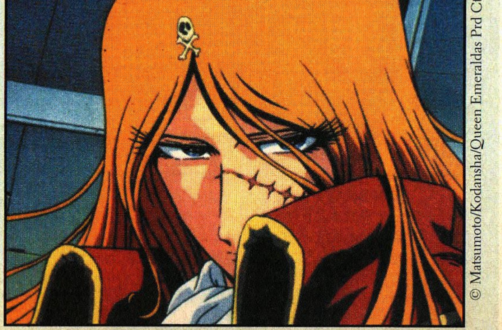
PACKED to the GILLES


The ANIME Companion
WHAT'S JAPANESE IN JAPANESE ANIMATION?
GILLES POITRAS

San Francisco publisher Stone Bridge Press has just released *The Anime Companion*, a guide to "What's Japanese in Japanese Animation". Compiled by self-confessed champion otaku Gilles Poitras, the book uses anime as a window into Japanese culture. Featuring several hundred entries on Japanese geography, cuisine and history, it's an ideal present for the anime fan who thinks he has it all – if only as a stern reminder that Japan's a big, real place. You can check out their website on **www.stonebridge.com**, and expect a review in the next issue of *Manga Max*. ●

THE FUGITIVE

Ronin space pirate Emeraldas is forced to wander the galaxy. Accused of piracy by governments hiding the rot at their own centre, she fights for freedom as and when she can. Featuring many characters already familiar from Leiji Matsumoto's other stories, *Queen Emeraldas* also boasts a mix of computer graphics and traditional cel animation, and now it's coming to the US courtesy of AD Vision, who have announced a VHS and DVD release in early summer 1999. According to the understated press release, it's "already being hailed as one of the greatest animation events of the decade." So best not miss it, eh.



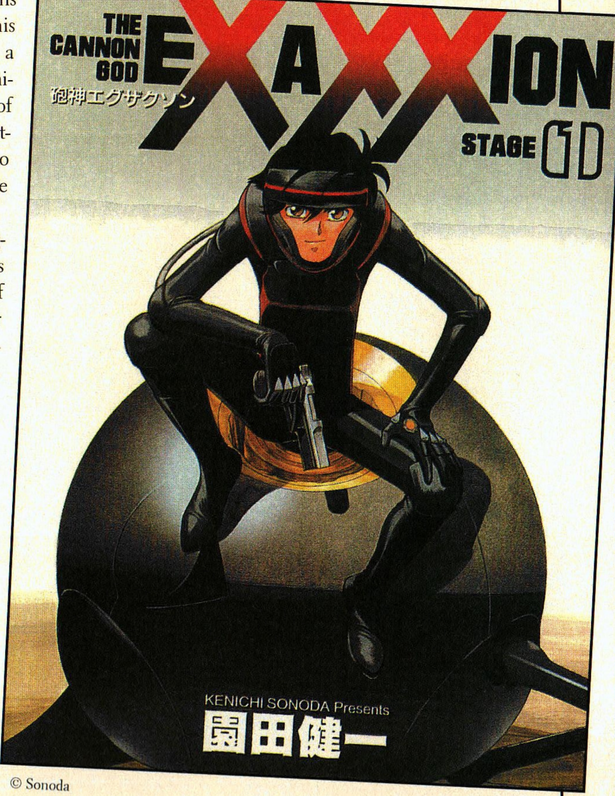
© Matsumoto/Kodansha/Queen Emeraldas Prd Cttee

EXAXXION INTO ACTION

Fans know and love Kenichi Sonoda for his battling babe designs in *Bubblegum Crisis* and *Gall Force*, and most recently for his cordite-scented manga *Gunsmith Cats*, but his latest work takes a breather from Chicago's mean streets to tell a tale of global domination, giant robots and very big guns. Hot from the pages of *Afternoon* magazine is *Cannon God Exaxxion*, and despite the titular *E-something-A-something-something-I-O-N* similarity to another recent robot saga, Sonoda's work is less angst, more action.

It's the future and mankind is living, *Alien Nation*-style, alongside the alien Liofaldians, whose arrival a decade earlier has brought unprecedented advances in technology and quality of life. But teenager Kano Houichi's eccentric scientist grandfather (here we go) distrusts the aliens. His fears are realised when, during the unveiling of a space elevator, Earth is declared the seventh colony of Liofaldo and the military is wiped out. Only one kid can save the world, and thanks to grandpa's high-tech "gunner suit," a top-heavy shapeshifting android girl named Minagata and the supergun-on-legs mecha Exaxxion, Kano is just the lad to do it.

Although *Exaxxion* is already into its second volume of manga, US translation house Studio Proteus have admitted that they do not intend to publish it in English for a while. With Sonoda's *Gunsmith Cats* already selling well for Proteus, boss Toren Smith has announced he would rather wait for the current series to end before launching its successor. The presence of two titles from the same writer-artist would be liable to damage sales for both, with impecunious fans forced to choose between them. ●



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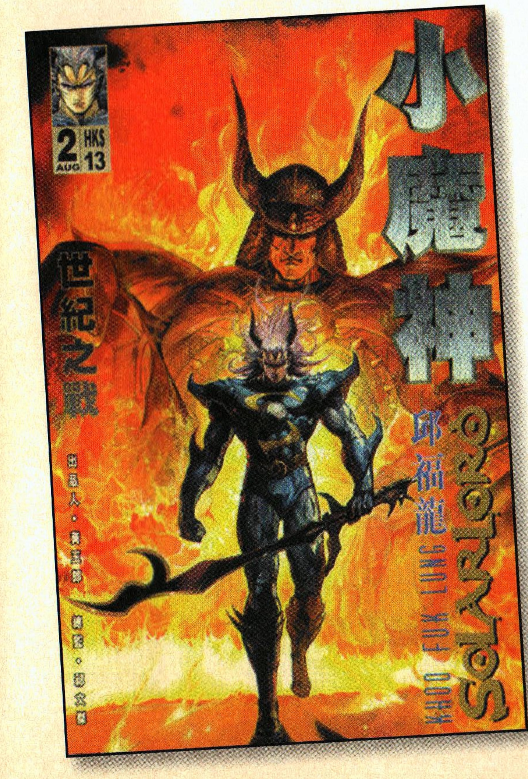
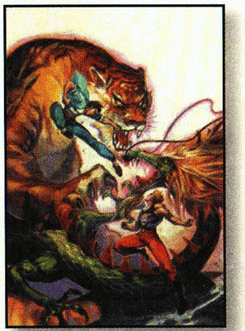
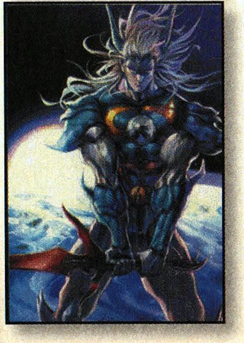
SPACE*LORD*







Long-time readers may remember MM9's examination of the Hong Kong comics business, and the trials and tribulations of publisher Tony "Jademan" Wong in the English-language market. After a long break from the Western scene, Wong's new company Jade Dynasty is back in the comics fray, with the forthcoming English releases of *Space Lord* and *Mega Dragon & Tiger*. Last time Jademan tried to produce the English version themselves, with titles including *The Force of Buddha's Palm*, *Oriental Heroes* and *Blood Sword*. This time the rights have been licensed by Image for a release this Spring. Comics author and manga rewriter James Hudnall is supervising the translation process. The last few years have brought a few changes to the style of Hong Kong comics – after the break-up of the original Jademan, many of the staff formed their own companies and began writing science fiction. At first glance, the forthcoming Image releases owe more to Freeman Comics' *Cyber Weapon Z* than to the old-school Jademan cavalcades of kung fu. For more information, check out www.thehud.com. ●

Secret Plot Deep #9
NeWMeN, B&W, 32pp,
$3.50/£2.30

Silky Whip #11
Oh!Great, B&W, 24pp,
$3.50/£2.30

The Sex-Philes #2
Benkyo Tamaoki, B&W,
$3.95/£2.65

IRONCAT

Crusher Joe #2
Haruko Takachiho, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95

Dragon Wars #11
Ryukihei, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95

Futaba-Kun Change! Vol 2 #2
Hiroshi Aro, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95

Hyper Dolls Vol 2 #1
Shinpei Itoh, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95

New Vampire Miyu #5
Narumi Kakinouchi, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95

Ogenki Clinic #6
B&W, 32pp, $2.95/£1.95 ADULT

MARVEL

Spiderman Manga #30/31
Ryoichi Ikegami, B&W, 24pp,
$2.99/£2.00

X-Men Manga #25/26
Yukikaze Amagi, B&W, 24pp,
$2.99/£2.00

MIXX ENTERTAINMENT

Sailor Moon Comic #5
Naoko Takeuchi, B&W, 48pp,
$2.95/£1.95

Mixxzine #5
Various, 128+pp, $4.99/£3.40

Smile #3
Features another instalment of
Sailor Moon Super S
Magazine, 80pp, $3.99/£2.75

RADIO COMIX

Mechanical Man Blues #2
Tsukasa Kotobuki, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95

VIZ COMMUNICATIONS

Pokemon: The Electric Tale of
Pikachu #4
Toshihiro Ono, B&W, 40pp,
$3.25/£2.15

Nightwarriors: Darkstalker's
Revenge #4
Run Ishida, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95
A young monk must go up
against the fearsome (yet strangely attractive) succubus, Morrigan!

No Need for Tenchi! Part 6 #4
Hitoshi Okuda, B&W, 40pp,

$3.25/£2.15

Animerica Extra Volume 2 #3
Various, B&W, 128pp,
$4.95/£3.30

Animerica #2
Anime news and magazine, 88pp,
$4.95/£3.50
Cover features Bastard! plus anime/manga news & reviews.

Pulp Volume 3 #3
Various, B&W, 144pp,
$5.95/£3.95

Dragonball #12
Akira Toriyama, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95
By the light of the full moon, Goku transforms into a giant ape!

Dragonball Z Part 2 #3
Akira Toriyama, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95

Neon Genesis Evangelion Volume 4 #1
Yoshiyuki Sadamoto, B&W,
32pp, $2.95/£1.95
Also available in a special 'unflipped' collector's version. Third child Asuka Langley arrives and promptly wreaks havoc.

Inu Yasha: A Feudal Fairy Tale #8
Rumiko Takahashi, B&W, 40pp,
$3.25/£2.15

Ranma Half #13
Rumiko Takahashi, B&W, 32pp,
$2.95/£1.95

Maison Ikkoku #7
Rumiko Takahashi, B&W, 40pp,
$3.25/£2.15

Striker vs the Third Reich GN
Hiroshi Takashige & Ryoji Minigawa, B&W, 160pp,
$15.95/£12.95
The third Striker graphic novel collects the strips that originally ran in Manga Vizion. Swot up in time for the Spriggan movie!

Maison Ikkoku: Student Affairs GN
Rumiko Takahashi, B&W, 264pp,
$16.95/£13.95

INCOMING MANGA/ANIME MAGAZINES: FEBRUARY

Giant Robot #14
General round up of underground (& some mainstream) Asian pop culture magazine,
88pp, $3.95/£2.95

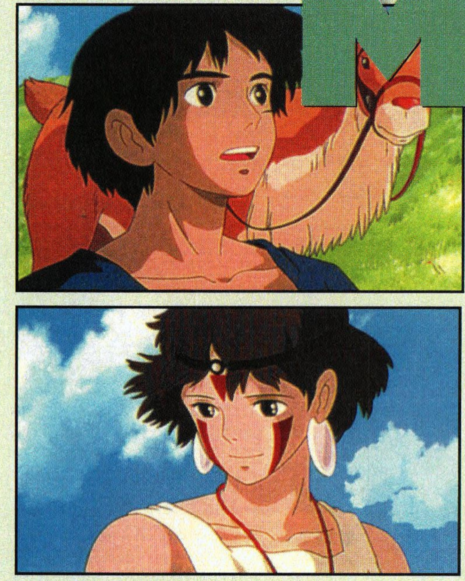
Protoculture Addicts #54
Features articles on Grandizer (aka Goldorak) and an article on Go Nagai.
Magazine, 64pp, $4.95/£3.50

INCOMING UK VIDEO RELEASES: FEBRUARY

PIONEER

NO CONFIRMED RELEASES

Princess Making


© Miyazaki, Nibariki, Tokuma Shoten

Helen McCarthy has announced that her next book will be devoted solely to the life and works of Hayao Miyazaki. The author of the *Anime Movie Guide*, who rates *My Neighbour Totoro* as her "favourite movie, of any kind, in any genre, ever," has spent several years trying to sell a Miyazaki book to publishers, to no avail. With the advent of Miyazaki's *Princess Mononoke* in America, McCarthy has finally reached agreement with California-based Stone Bridge Press (yes, them again). Slated for a release in autumn 1999 and with a working title of *Princess Maker*, the book will be the first in the English language to concentrate on a single figure in the anime industry. The author is currently contemplating a trip to Japan to interview the director in person. We did ask her to comment, but she was too busy cartwheeling around the room making whoop-whoop noises. ●

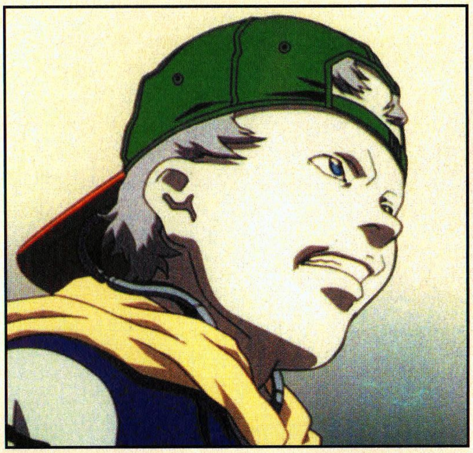
SHEEP DON'T PUSH ME

Japan, that high-octance cyberland of clichés with attitude, has found two new additions to the endless procession of sex-and-violence animation on screen. Insidious animated imports from the occident have now taken over Japanese television, in the form of leggy scientist Wallace and his anthropomorphic sidekick Gromit. After their award-winning films went down well in Japan, the plasticine actors were approached by CM House, a Tokyo advertising company, and asked if they and their ovine nemeses would take part in a commercial. The UK superstars refused to leave home, but were happy to perform in an *Everybody Putching* ad for the Japanese audience, which featured our heroes menaced by angry sheep with spoons. Apparently, the Japanese think the British sense of humour is exotic and somehow inscrutable. Putching, in case you were wondering, is a kind of creme caramel dessert from Glico. But there was one thing bothering us – why have they all got such big eyes...? ●

EVENING POST
© Wallace & Gromit Ltd

SPRIGGAN SPRINGS AHEAD

Readers looking for the UK anime review section this month may think it has disappeared, but fear not, the slow winter release schedules resulted in our decision to devote most of the review section to the London Film Festival. The highlight of the season had to be the UK premiere of Hirotsugu Kawasaki's *Spriggan*, which proved so popular with London cinemagoers that the original two screenings were increased to four. One special feature was arranged by the British Film Institute for local schools and colleges, at which film journalist Ken Hollings spoke about Japan's nuclear experience, and *Manga Max* editor Jonathan Clements enlightened listeners with his apocryphal tales of Cup-A-Soup in anime folklore. They also discussed problems in anime casting and genre writing for different markets, but the crowd seemed more interested in discussing "the really neat bit where the kid got stabbed," and "the big fat bloke with the chain gun." So a good time was had by all, except perhaps the teachers who thought they'd be taking their charges to watch *Memories* or *Totoro*. ●



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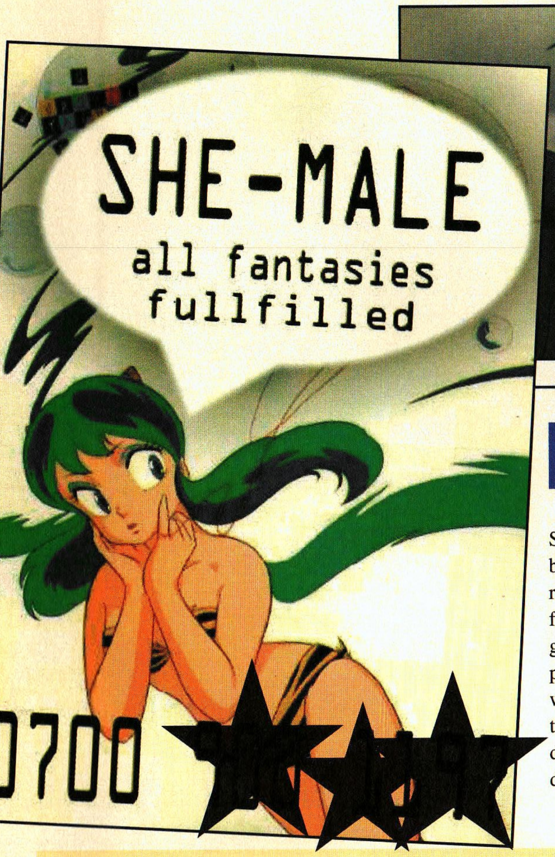


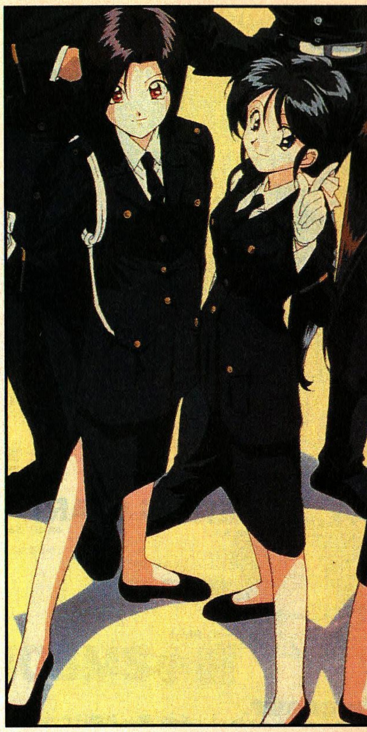
EASTWARD 'HO

Spotted in a London phone box by one of our roving reporters, this anime babe fallen on hard times. It just goes to show that there are anime fans in all walks of life, and perhaps even people who can cater to their "special needs," whatever they may be. Considering the service on offer, we did toy with the idea of calling the number and asking why they didn't think Ranma would be more appropriate. But then we decided that would just be silly. ●

InBrief

Meanwhile, *Evangelion* director Hideaki Anno is up to something again. Still in the midst of directing the school soap opera *His Secret Her Secret*, Anno found time out of his busy schedule to take a cameo role in the new live-action film *Dangerous Cop Forever*. Anno was more than willing to play a gun maniac in this, perhaps the final instalment in the long-running Japanese police series.

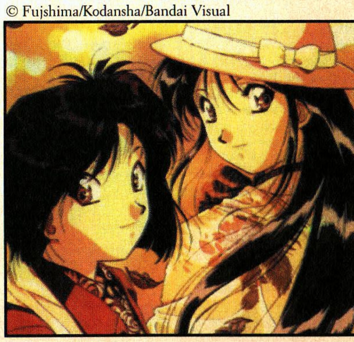
***Grave of the Fireflies* director Isao Takahata has been awarded the Purple Ribbon Medal, an accolade for achievements in academia or the arts that has never before been awarded to an animator. The long-serving Studio Ghibli scion dropped a subtle hint and accepted on behalf of the anime industry as a whole. Can it be long before Miyazaki gets a similar gong? ●**



ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

You're Under Arrest, Kosuke Fujishima's tale of two lady police officers in a typically-unthreatening Japanese suburb, is now moving into the movie stakes.The forthcoming cinema edition, due for release this year, will be something of a reunion for the team who produced *Shutendoji*, since it brings director Junji Nishimura back together with scriptwriter Masashi Togawa. MM is tempted to suggest that one of the police officers should be revealed to be a foundling demon-child, embroiled in a war across time with Japanese ogres. It might make a change from helping old ladies across the road and joshing with comedy terrorists. Although still in development, the movie threatens to improve the "virtual" romance of cop Miyuki and her would-be beau Nakajima, in amongst the usual laughs and comic misunderstandings. ●

© Fujshima/Kodansha/Bandai Visual



MANGA VIDEO

Fist of the North Star TV Series Vol 1
£12.99 Dub
Kenshiro returns to smite more evil doers with his awesome fist!

AD VISION

Slayers: The Movie
£12.99 Dub

KISEKI

Battle Skipper Vol 2
£7.99 Sub
The long delayed title finally gets a release date. Or does it...?

INCOMING US VIDEO RELEASES: FEBRUARY

AD VISION

Sorceror Hunters Vol 1: Of Inhuman Bondage
$24.95 Dub, $29.95 Sub

Bite Me! Chameleon
$29.95 Sub
Bad Taste taken to extremes in this weird tale of a freaky little kid and what he gets up to at school.

Legend of Crystania: Cave of theSealed
$19.98 dub, $29.95 Sub
Part one of a new trilogy.

ANIME 18

Beast City: Awakening of the Beast
$29.95 Sub/Dub

PIONEER

Pokemon: Vol 2
$14.98 Dub
Three episodes per tape.

Pokemon: Vol 3
$14.98 Dub
Three episodes per tape.

Battle Athletes: TV Training Vol 2
$24.98 Dub/$29.98 Sub

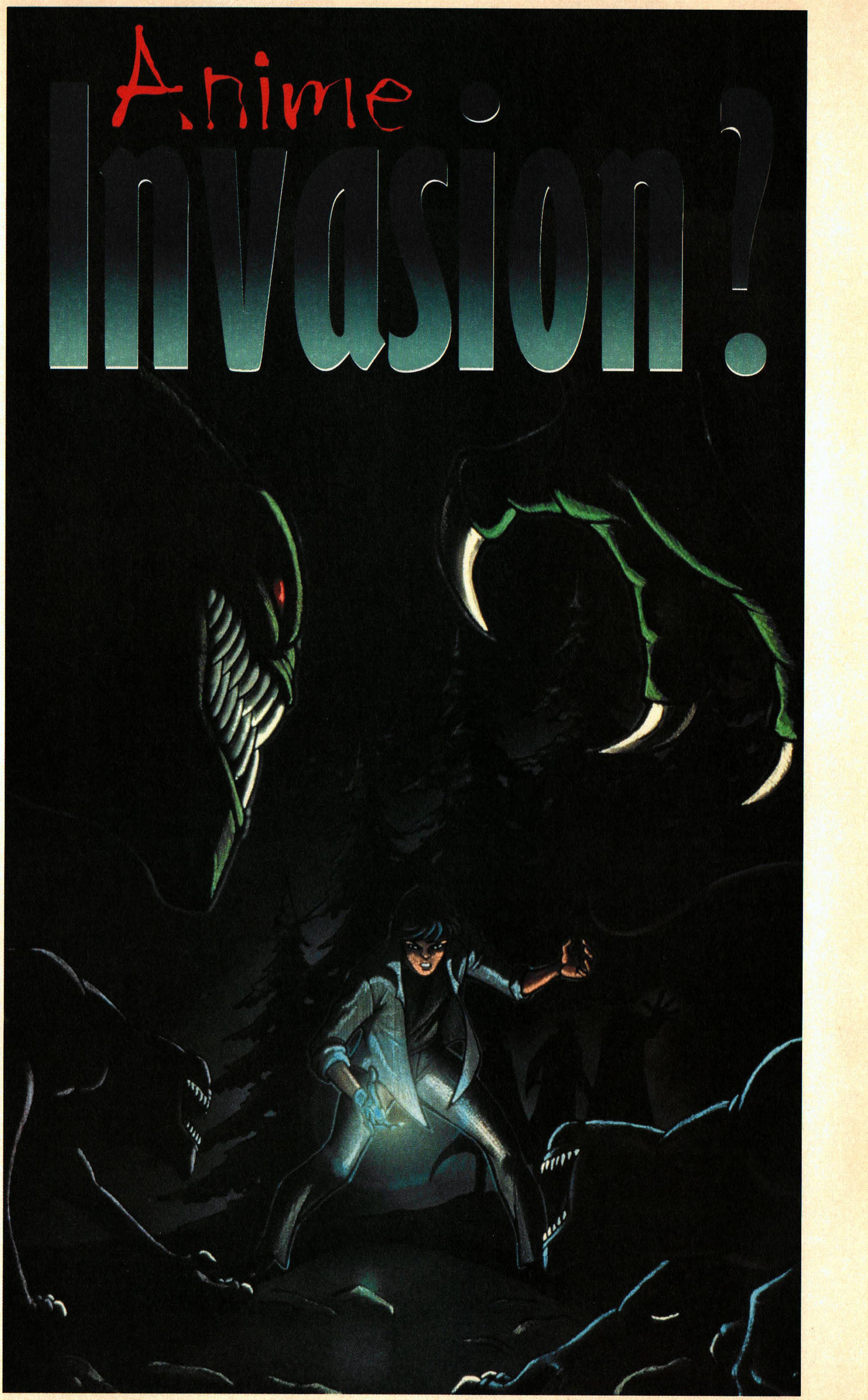
Magical Project S Vol 2
A self parodying look at the 'magical girl' genre featuring familiar characters from Tenchi
$29.98 Sub

VIZ VIDEO

Ranma Half Hard Battle: Smells Like Evil Spirit
$29.95 Sub
Happosai seperates Ranma's bad side from his good side, and of course, mayhem commences.

Maison Ikkoku: Godai Come Home
$24.95 Dub
2 episodes per volume.

Anime Invasion?



Jim Swallow hits the beach with the front-line troops of *Invasion America*, the first US attempt at creating an equivalent to anime television.

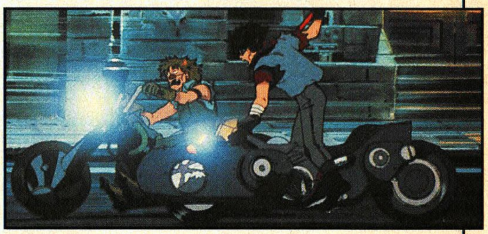
So your Dad's an exiled alien king and his enemies are trying to take over the Earth. And you're just an average high school kid, suddenly forced to lead the resistance and regain your birthright as ruler of the universe. Sound familiar?

It's an animated science fiction drama series, broadcast in a late-evening slot on national television to an audience of adults, featuring high-grade voice talent from famous actors, co-created by award-winning directors and producers. In other words, nothing new to a Japanese viewing public used to anime in the mainstream market, except this isn't a show from the Far East – it's *Invasion America*, an animated series conceived and originated in the US by Steven Spielberg's DreamWorks SKG studio for the Warner Brothers network.

Has the Western animation industry at last taken on the influence of its Japanese counterpart? One person whose viewpoint is uniquely suited to answer that question is Kuni Tomita, *Invasion America's* art director and storyboard supervisor, a Tokyo native who cut her teeth working for studio Madhouse (*Monster City*, *Cyber City Oedo 808*, *Wicked City*) in the early Eighties. "There are so many differences between American and Japanese animated shows, but I think one of the biggest is that anime usually have a story that continues over the entire series, whereas American shows are just separate episodes with hardly any connection between them," she says.

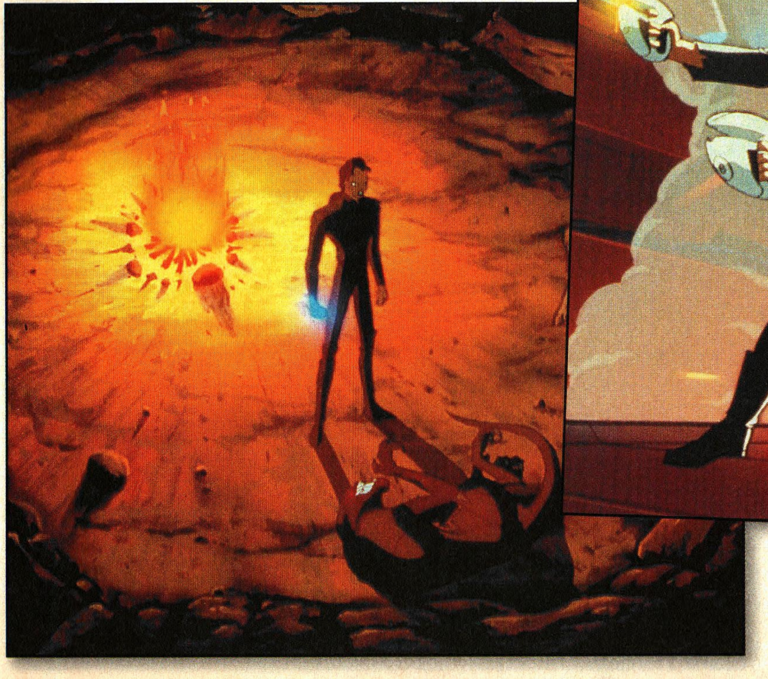
"American creatives and studio executives seem to be a lot more conservative than Japanese in what they will or will not try in animation"

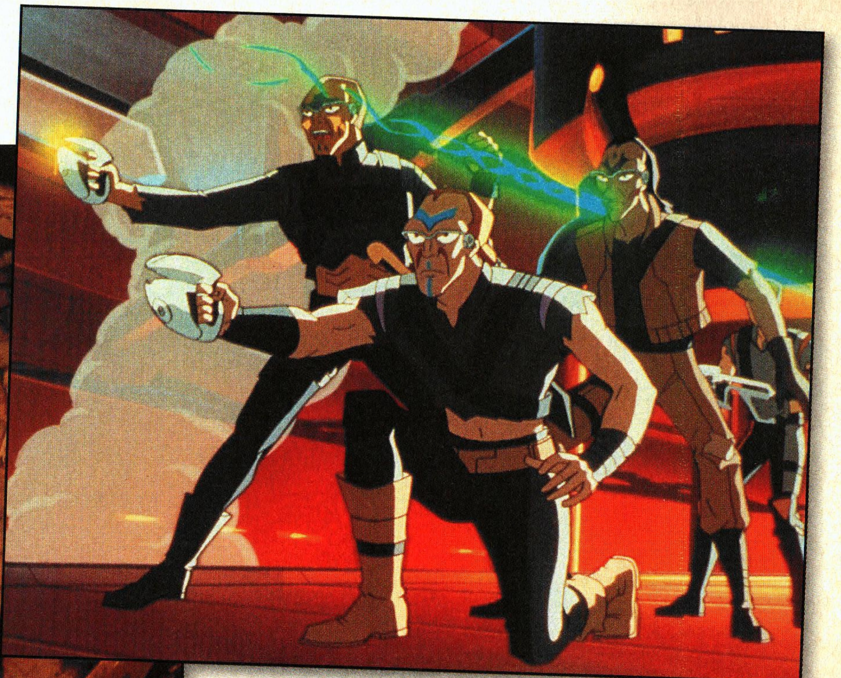
Tomita thinks that ongoing tales create a different kind of viewer, one far more willing to tune in every week, as opposed to the casual watching habits created by episodic shows. Disney's television animation studio had experimented with short 'story arcs' early on in their *Gargoyles* fantasy series, but Tomita feels that *Invasion America* is the first US show to copy the anime model fully. "The Western audiences and the staff differ greatly as well –American creatives and studio executives seem to be a lot more conservative than Japanese in what they will or will not try in animation, especially outside comedy shows. There also seems to be a dislike of anything that is not fully and realistically animated, any artwork that does not look like real life, whereas the Japanese will watch anything, if it's life-like or not!" The series' first (and perhaps only) season also features a high degree of computer-generated images blended with traditional cel animation, created using the versatile LightWave software as seen on the SF drama *Babylon 5*. "I think the CGI is great! We have between 40-70 percent CGI on each episode, with the special effects and spaceships, and it looks good – I think we should have more!"

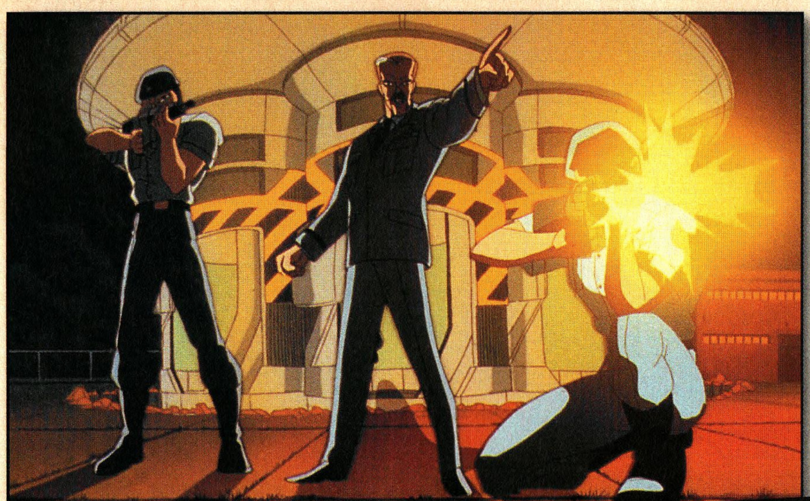


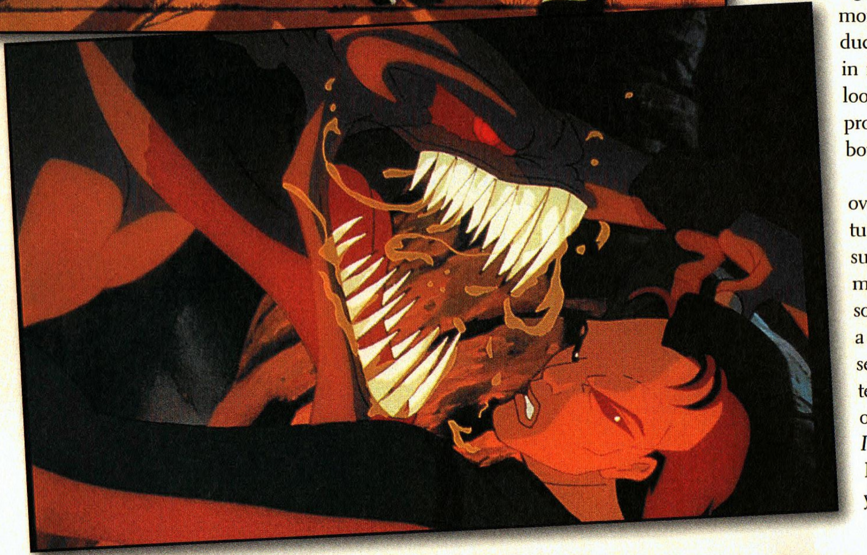
Tomita began her animation career at Madhouse straight out of high school. "I started off as an assistant animator, doing work for film, television and video, working my way up through a number of different studios." Her resumé features famous industry names like Toei, Tokyo Movie Shinsha and Sunrise, and her work appears in high-profile anime, including several *Lupin III* TV movies and the 1988 science fiction mega-hit *Akira*. Her arrival in the United States in 1990 took her to Los Angeles' Project X Productions, a storyboard and layout studio, and before joining DreamWorks SKG's animation division, Tomita also worked on several Disney TV cartoon projects and Marvel's recent *Spiderman* series. "I came to the USA because I was raised on American television as a child, watching shows like *I Love Lucy* and *Combat!*" she recalls with a smile. Tomita's special responsibility on *Invasion America* was to co-ordinate the way the show looked. "I was both art director and storyboard supervisor on the series. I handled the design of each of the

Above: Earthbound Edokko from Akira
Below left & right: Alien Tyrusians from Invasion Earth









Disguised as humans, the Tyrusians prepare to take over with some particularly nasty pets in tow!

human and alien characters and the drawing of storyboards for the individual episodes, as well as overlooking the layout of the animation."

***Invasion America*'s plotline follows the pacey adolescent wish-fulfilment of many an anime saga**; David Carter (voiced by newcomer Mikey Kelley), a directionless teen, discovers the secret of his long-lost father Cale Oosha when dad is revealed to be an alien warrior king from the planet Tyrus. The half-human, half-alien lad becomes the target of his father's ruthless enemies, in a plan to conquer Earth using Tyrusian agents secreted in positions of power across the USA, and David reluctantly accepts the mantle of leadership that is thrust upon him.

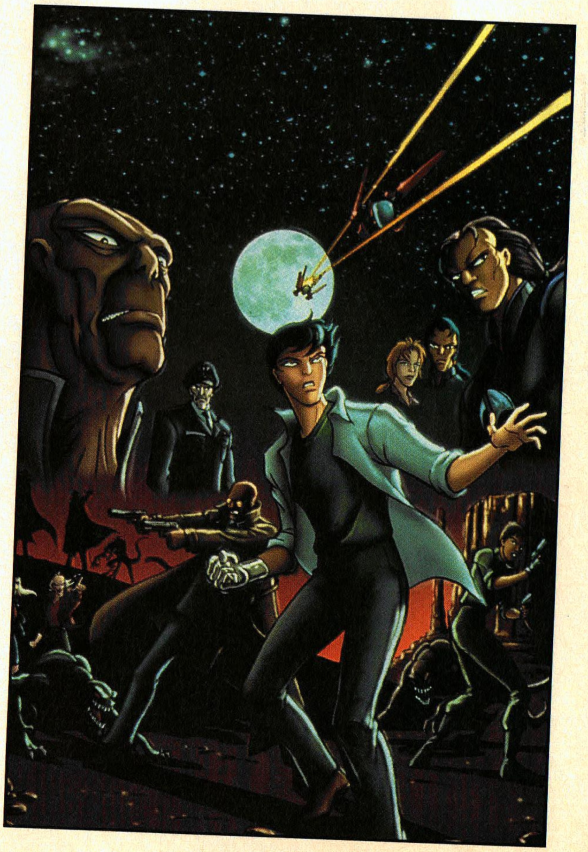
Co-executive produced by Steven Spielberg and former *Star Trek* film producer Harve Bennett, *Invasion America* features voice talent from actors such as Leonard Nimoy (*Star Trek*), Ronny Cox (*RoboCop*), Lorenzo Lamas (*Renegade*), James B. Sikking (*Hill Street Blues*) and Robert Urich (*Spencer For Hire*). Hard-core anime fans will immediately see the resemblance to epic shows like *Space Cruiser Yamato* and *Mobile Suit Gundam* in both the story and the storytelling, but to the wider, anime-illiterate US television audience, this 'miniseries' approach to animation broke new ground.

While she praises the show's scope and vision, Tomita candidly admits that she was also disappointed to some degree with elements of the finished product. "We tried very hard to blend the American cartoon style with the look of a Japanese anime, but I wasn't happy with some of the animation we did – one of the differences between American and Japanese [management] is the level of control, and a lot of the high level staff who didn't really understand the anime style were making changes to the designs and the artwork."

Tomita feels that the closing of the gap between the animation industries of East and West can only be a good thing, although she does have some reservations. "I like the idea of the deal between Studio Ghibli and Disney, to bring Miyazaki's films over to the West. I enjoy all of his films and I thought that *Princess Mononoke* was very good, but after I heard it described in the US as '*Ferngully* meets *Akira*', I do have to wonder if an American audience will really get it." Does she see *Invasion America* as part of this coming together of East and West? "Oh yes. I hope that we'll see more animation like this in the future, with more co-productions. Right now, in Japan, there are is a lot of anime in films and domestic television, but animators are still looking for work." She adds that co-productions could provide opportunities for the animation industries on both sides of the Pacific.

"We tried very hard to blend the American cartoon style with the look of a Japanese anime, but I wasn't happy with some of the animation we did"

With the first 13-episode season of *Invasion America* over, Tomita has since worked on DreamWorks' next feature, the much awaited *Prince of Egypt* and is now pursuing new projects. "I would love to come back and do more, if the show continues." she notes; but, while sources at DreamWorks have stated that outline plots for a further four seasons have been prepared, the fate of the series remains unclear, despite claims that the show netted record viewing figures in key demographic markets on the Warner Brothers network. Should it return, *Invasion America*'s second year will air in the Spring of 1999; plans for broadcasting the series in Europe have yet to be finalised. ●



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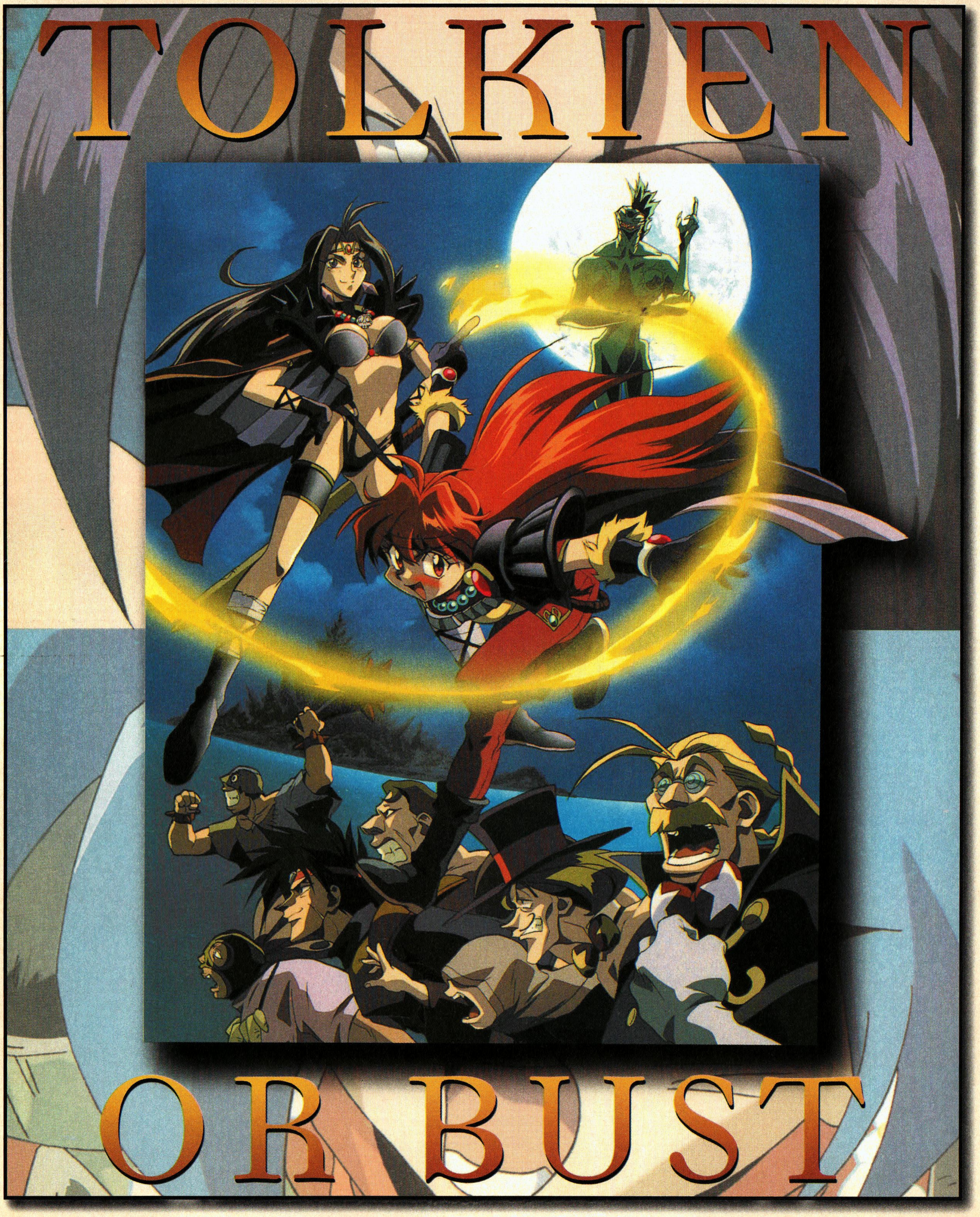
漫 MANGA VIDEO 画

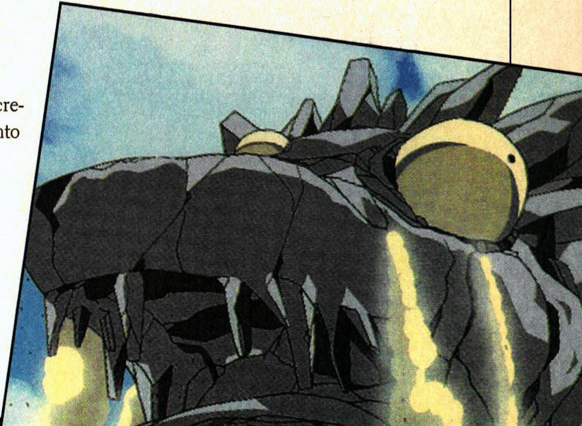
BJ BLACK JACK

A PHYCHO-THRILLER OF A SURGEON WITH THE HANDS OF GOD.

TOLKIEN OR BUST

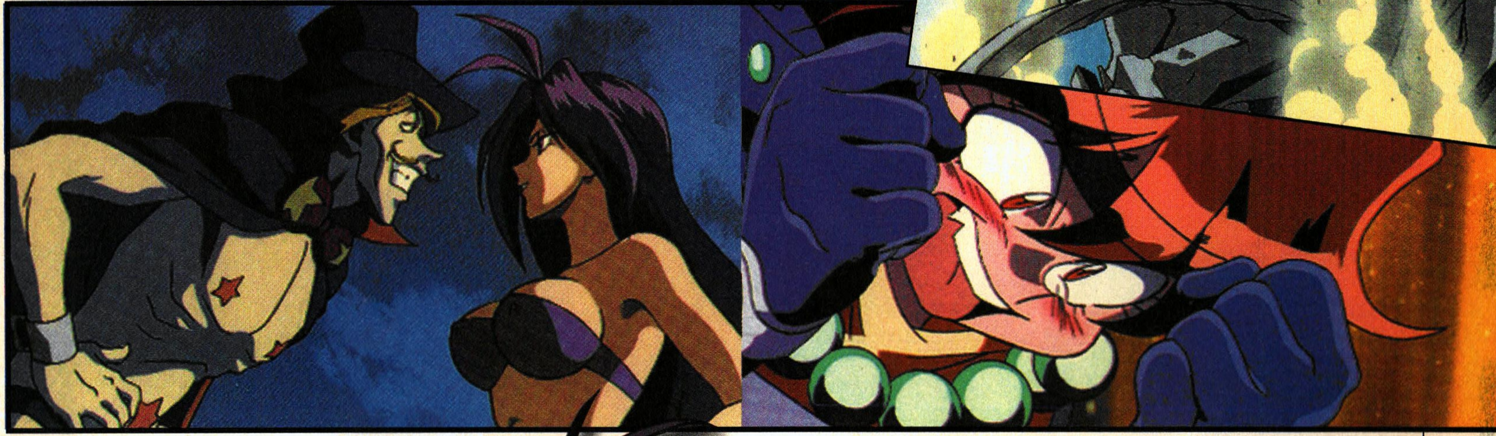


Two girls eternally seeking fame and fortune, doomed forever to wander the land. All they used to want was dinner. Now they won't get out of bed for less than a king's ransom. One is a sensual, sinuous snake-goddess. And the other one isn't. But enough about writers *Motoko Tamamuro* and *Cathy Sterling*. Here come the Slayers!



The ancient sages told of her coming. By her extremely bad temper shall she be known. And her short size. And her flat chest. Thus it was seen as fitting that her mortal enemy should also be her best friend, and have bestowed upon her by the gods of cleavage, the most unfeasable breasts ever seen (at least until the release of *Let's Go With Jungle*).

You've heard of the Eternal Hero. So there must be an Eternal Heroine. So logically (no, bear with me) perhaps there's even an Eternal Heroine's Less-Attractive Friend (Who Has A Lovely Personality). And their quest consists of drinking in pairs, while the attractive, arrogant one with the big boobies gets all the attention, and the plain companion sips listlessly at her Pina Colada, waiting for her handsome prince.

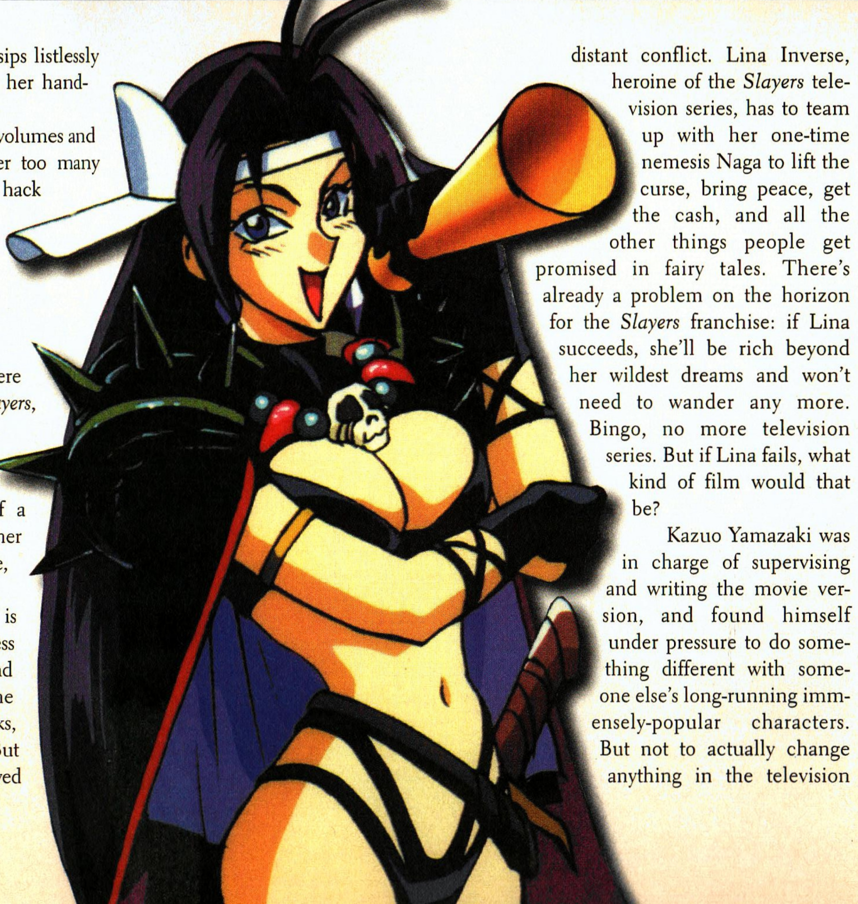


It might work. Try writing 20 volumes and see if there are any takers. After too many decades of sub-Tolkienesques, of hack writers committing trilogy and rpg cash-ins, the backlash had to come. The USA gave us *Bored of the Rings*, the UK gave us Terry Pratchett, and Japan? Japan gave us *Dragon Half*.

Sorry, where were we? We were supposed to be talking about *Slayers*, but even *Slayers* knows that *Dragon Half* got there first, got the T-shirt and did it better. Ryusuke Mita's tale of a squashed-down dragon-baby and her love for Dick Saucer, the suave, singing Dragonslayer, took fantasy satire to the limits. *Slayers* is *Dragon Half*'s younger cousin, less manic simply because it has to find an acceptable level across the longer attention spans of books, videos *and* television series. But after the immense success enjoyed by Araizumi and Kanzaka's original creation, the *Slayers* were bound to fall into other hands.

READ BETWEEN THE LIES

Slayers the Motion Picture is a fantasy adventure on a cursed isle, where ghostly elves play out memories of a distant conflict. Lina Inverse, heroine of the *Slayers* television series, has to team up with her one-time nemesis Naga to lift the curse, bring peace, get the cash, and all the other things people get promised in fairy tales. There's already a problem on the horizon for the *Slayers* franchise: if Lina succeeds, she'll be rich beyond her wildest dreams and won't need to wander any more. Bingo, no more television series. But if Lina fails, what kind of film would that be?

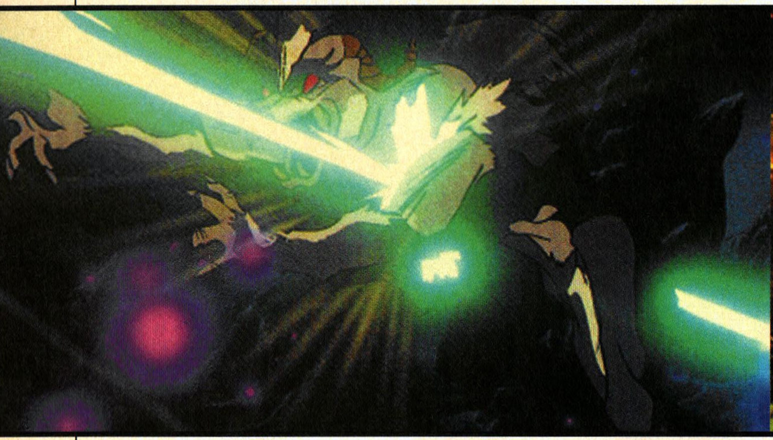


Kazuo Yamazaki was in charge of supervising and writing the movie version, and found himself under pressure to do something different with someone else's long-running immensely-popular characters. But not to actually change anything in the television

Left: Spirit in black.
Above: Scenes from Lina's inverse universe

series, still going gangbusters on Japanese networks (well, in the top 40 anime anyway, just above *Tenchi Muyo*).

Ever the innovator, Yamazaki tried to think his way into the script by imagining a trip to the pub. "When I started, I was thinking, what would happen if I had to have a drink with them. I could probably make conversation with Naga, but I wouldn't understand Lina. Naga would probably blow me up if anything happened, but realistically, she would probably just shut up and eat rather than waste time talking to a boring middle-aged man like me. So for me, Naga became like a big-sister figure for Lina. In the original story, they're more like rivals. With Lina, I wanted to broaden her range as a character – I made her more emotional than in the original. I can say it was a lot easier to write Naga. I was so afraid of distorting Lina's personality that I dealt with her quite timidly."



The devil always has the best tunes – especially when the devil in question is the archetypal nasty big sister in a leather bikini. Naga has the mad "Queen of Roses" laugh common to anime bad girls, and the ultimate guarantee of a storm in a D-cup, in the Japanese dub she was even played by Maria "Jung Freud" Kawamura. In other words, she is so larger-than-life that writing her scenes and dialogue comes easily. It's putting words into the mouth of Lina Inverse, the put-upon girl who is the real heroine of *Slayers*, that becomes a difficult job. Luckily for Yamazaki, he had a ready source of Lina dialogue – every D&D player that ever lived.

FICTIONAL REALITY

Slayers is the anti-*Lodoss*, a roleplayers' tale that accentuates the naff over the portentuous. One huge knowing wink to camera, the characters speak modern English, chat amiably with supposedly-threatening bandits, and rest assured that as genre-heroes, they have no chance of not making it to the closing credits. For the world of the *Slayers* is player-friendly, aimed at the D&D kids who mess around in the back while the games master consults arcane manuals.

Slayers can be found in that contemptuous glint in the players' eyes, when they realise that the innocent sound of rolling dice is an idle games master dreaming up an unnecessary wandering monster to fill out the time. Every time they see a trap coming a mile off, or realise that a chance meeting on the road to town will always consist of evil bandits, it is a *Slayers* moment. And every time the games master tries an important-sounding speech in cod-classical language, *Slayers* can be seen as the players crack up and tell him: "Whatever!"

You can actually see these moments coming in the film, and their very predictability is what draws many fans while repelling many non-believers. Just as Lina and Naga realise nothing has happened for a while, they are set upon by a group of warriors. Irony, or are they just getting their sarcastic comments in mere seconds ahead of the audience? For Yamazaki, the answer is a bit of both because the plot is a minor consideration in the *Slayers* universe. Like Terry Pratchett's menagerie of undesirables, *Slayers* has always been a character-driven piece. The episodic nature of the television series relied, even luxuriated in the injection of fresh characters in each episode, manufacturing situations through their interactions with the leads.

Dragon Half went off the deep end of zany comedy, and *Slayers* treads over remarkably similar ground. But after the post-modern satire of *Dragon Half* (where one character even stops the show to watch the previous episode, and complains that all his scenes were cut), *Slayers* seems a little out of its depth. Then again, it's not often that a story can set itself up for the deadpan delivery of lines like "So we meet again for the first time." Many bad-guys may set out on an evil scheme for world domination, but few would seek to fund it by running a chain of hotels (though our experiences at the Heathrow Radisson Edwardian do provide ample evidence to the contrary). When someone introduces themself as the "seventh most powerful sorcerer" on the cursed island, you hardly need to be a rocket scientist to know how many fights are going to come next, and with whom the grand finale will be. Such snide sarcasm, good-hearted enough to laugh at its own improbability, is *Slayers*' distinguishing characteristic.

SEX, MURDER, ART

Yamazaki's original plan, to combine several episodes from the series into the film version, was dismissed by executives at the studio who wanted an all-new story. But as per usual, a studio demand for something "new" is a minefield, made doubly difficult by Yamazaki's realisation that the original authors were still churning out stories, and that if he rocked the boat too much it would upset series continuity. Whereas the *Slayers* television series remains an episodic farce of food-jokes and slapstick, the *Slayers* movies are aimed at a slightly older audience. In this case, that audiences's needs seem to have been met by an increased animation budget and a few off-colour breast jokes levered in with a shoehorn. But, as Yamazaki explains, he wasn't left with much choice.

"You can't make a love story with Lina or Naga, can you? In a Naga love story, men would keep approaching her and then get blown up. The interesting aspect of *Slayer* lies in the other characters; if I had Lina risking her life for love (rather than her good nature), it would be a completely different story from the original *Slayers*. It would require a whole different attitude. As far as I understand it, the novelty of Kanzaka's work is not in the sexes or complicated relationships, just in pure comedy."

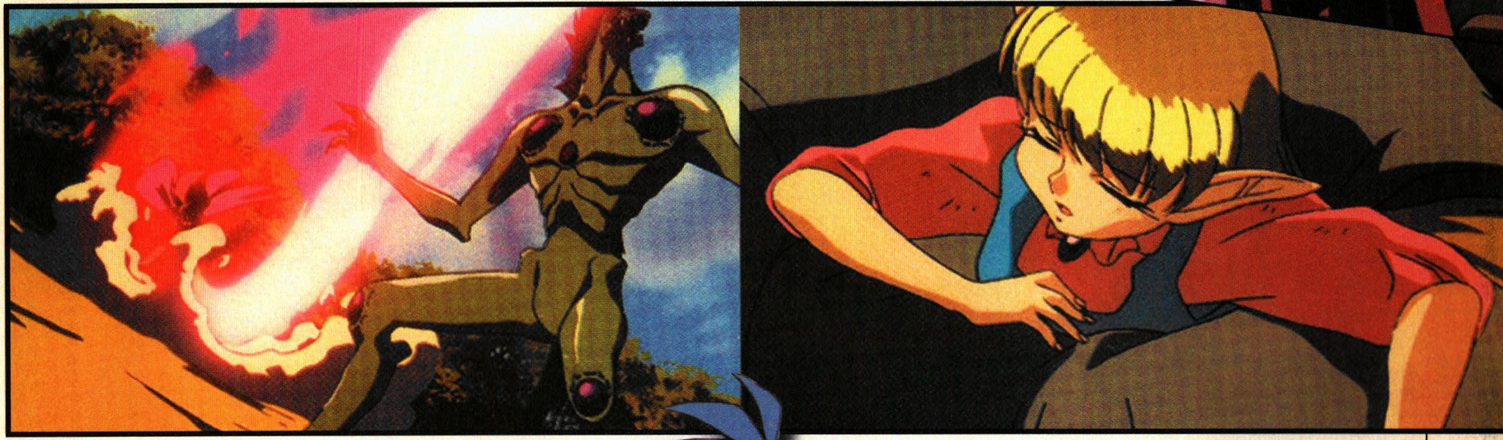
The movie does include Rowdy, a blue-haired boy with a sword of light who bears an uncanny resemblance to a figure from the *Slayers* television series: Lina's travelling companion Gourry. As Yamazaki explains, the character's origins were all tied up in the need to make a show that both was and wasn't part of the series continuity. "Originally I wanted that kid to be Gourry as a child. I regarded the story as a temporal paradox, since the island was part of the continent, but also trapped in its own spatio-temporal feedback. When I suggested it, Mr Kanzaka offered to come up with a name for an ancestor of Gourry, and so that's what we decided. After that, everything went well."

So there's clever. A character from a long-running television series reaches the edge of the map, gets involved in a great time-slip adventure and saves the day, only to change the time-continuum so radically that her cinema adventures could never have taken place. As Yamazaki points out, it's a handy get-out clause that preserves continuity, and also a modern variant on one of the oldest endings in the book: "There are still stories Kanzaka hasn't written, which, of course, I can't touch. I was afraid of distorting the original world, so I thought I should make it simple. When the film ends, everything I have created becomes untrue – just as if you woke up and it was all a dream."

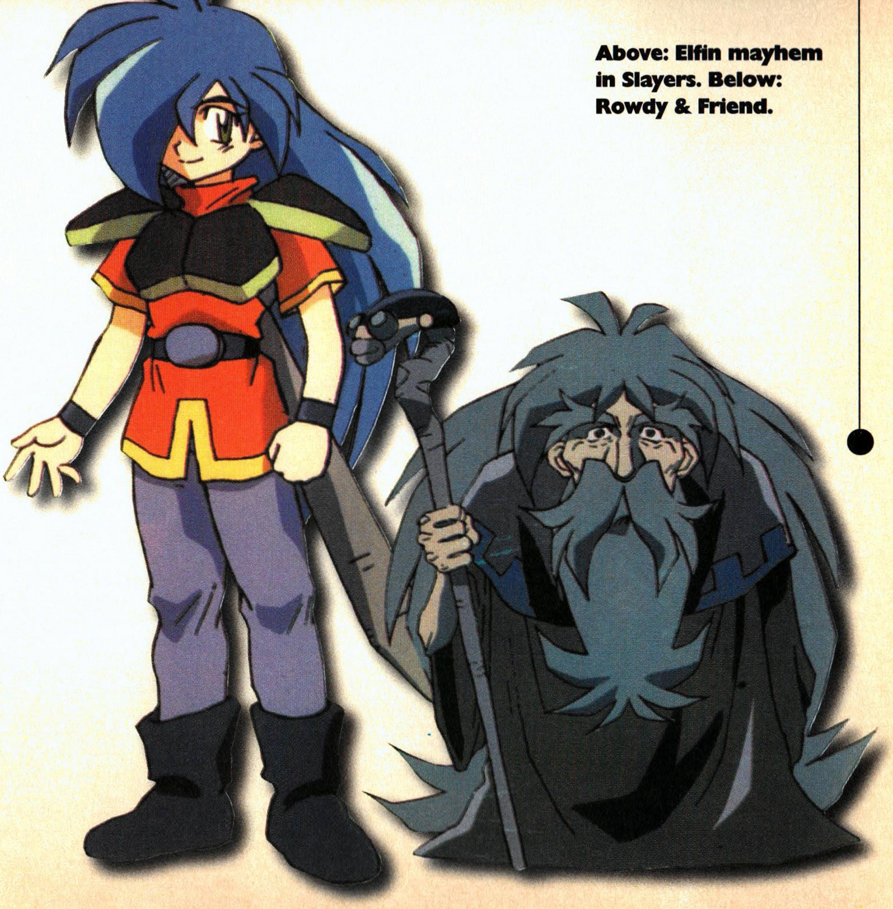
There are moments, such as when a magical jellyfish attack is countered by a swarm of sorcerous sea-cucumbers, where *Slayers* borders on *Dragon Half*'s surreal pottiness, but much of the opportunity for real humour is replaced by spiteful exchanges about bust sizes, or, on dangerously thin ice here, sly gags about the thinness of the plot.

But Yamazaki for one, has no doubt that the *Slayers* movie will bring an audience of fans to the other incarnations of the series: "I made this film for a male and female *shogakusei* audience [*under-15s – Ed.*]. I wanted them to travel with the characters holding the *Slayers* map in their hands. I hope it is a new experience for them and one that they enjoy. On this occasion, the island is just one tiny piece of the map, a place where my own 'games-mastering' holds sway. If you like it, I urge you to journey through the continent of adventures that is the original *Slayers* series. It's waiting there for you." ●

***Slayers* the Motion Picture is available in the USA from AD Vision, who are also releasing it in the UK on 6 February. The *Slayers* television series is only available on video in the US from Software Sculptors. The *Slayers* comic is available from CPM Manga. The next *Slayers* television series (appropriately called *Slayers* NEXT), is coming soon, also from Software Sculptors.**

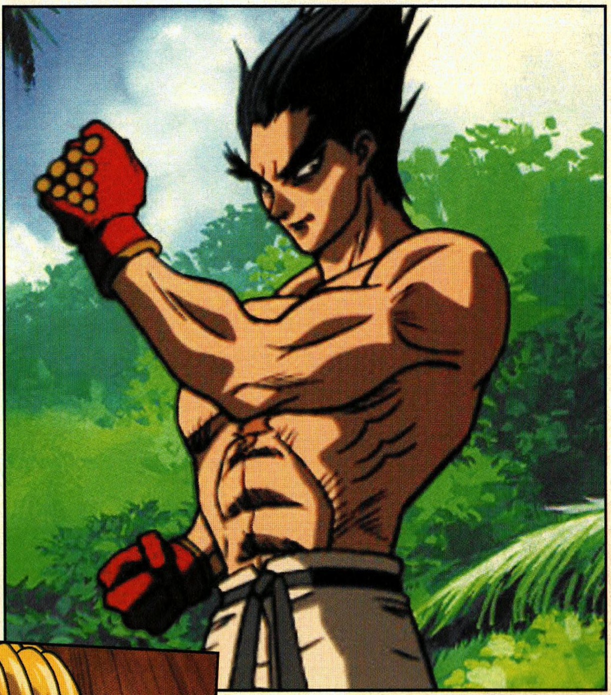


Above: Elfin mayhem in Slayers. Below: Rowdy & Friend.



IMMORTAL COMBAT

Someone on the Tekken staff is having a little fun with the rule book. If you don't like it, *Julia Sertori* will punch you until you do. Coward. Loser. Sissy. Come here and say that. I said come HERE!



It's the day after tomorrow, and the world is falling apart. Science is progressing in leaps and bounds and the human race cannot keep up. Cloning has been outlawed by the Darwin Treaty, but an international crimefighting organisation suspects that a millionaire corporate boss is planning something unpleasant.

"We're not sure what it is, but it probably involves a Mad Scheme for World Domination Abusing the Brilliant Mind of a Great Scientist. Or something. Anyone else have any ideas?"

"We could always have, like, genetic engineering making monsters and stuff," suggests a voice at the back.

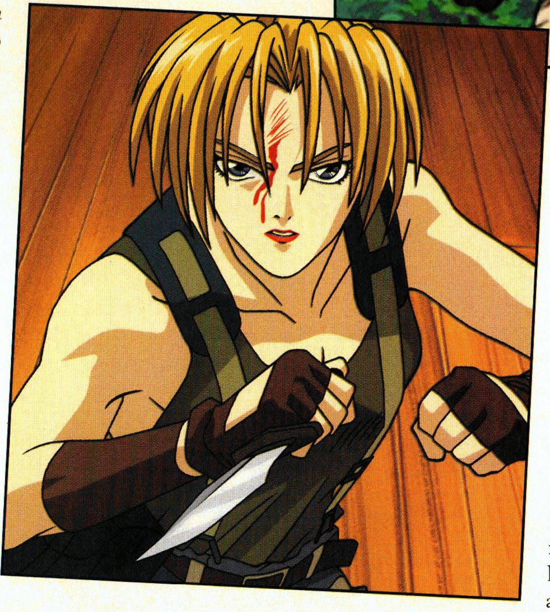
> **"...there's Yamaguchi's message for the bright spark who dreamed up the whole project. You say you want fighting? I've got your fighting *right* here!"**

"War robots do it for me," says another, idly twirling a pencil.

"Dinosaurs are in at the moment. Everybody else is doing them," pipes up the new kid.

There is a pause, and they turn to look at the lonely figure with a notepad.

"Are you getting all this down, Mr Yamaguchi?" asks the head honcho.



No, I wasn't there at the *Tekken* script conference, but I've been to plenty like it. And I've even been the poor sap with the notepad. But right now, I'd love to be Ryota Yamaguchi, because the man chosen to take the hit game to the small screen has kicked them all where it hurts.

Every year it's the same thing. A big-selling game and someone eventually decides it would be nice on video too. Time for a meeting, let's see what we can do with this title. You can imagine them all sitting round a table trying to think of a new angle. Adaptations of fighting games are often the cheesiest of all; they seem like a bright idea when you look at the sales figures for the game itself, but once the licensors have finished listing all the requirements, it's enough to make a writer weep. Standard laws in an anime adaptation of a game include plenty of fighting, compulsory appearances for all of the characters, a plot as a vague excuse to get them all together, and not much else. Did we forget to mention the fighting?

But the script for *Tekken* looks like a sneaky scribe's attempt to have some fun with the marketing people. Ryota Yamaguchi gave them everything they wanted, and then kept on going. Just as *Evangelion* asked what it would *really* be like if your Dad was the kind of nutter who built a giant robot and forced you to pilot it against aliens, *Tekken* asks what sort of world would produce a big arena where people hit each other.

The answer is our world, every now and then. Glorify might as right, sing out for the triumph of the will, and tomorrow will truly belong to you. The act of fighting is itself a truth, we are told. And there's Yamaguchi's message for the bright spark who dreamed up the whole project. You say you want fighting? I've got your fighting *right* here!

The "Darwin" treaty could simply be an agreement signed in north Australia, but is more likely to be a nod to the survival of the fittest. There's definitely someone having a laugh if the opening montage of a fighting anime includes a picture from the French Revolution and a voice-over that glorifies combat for combat's sake. Forget all that namby-pamby stuff about honour and justice, it tells us. Aggression is a means of survival, and those who hanker after some nebulous truth are just avoiding the obvious: that the truth of nature is violence. If you bought this video, you don't want a moral, or a love story, you want the mother of all battles. Voilà!

There's plenty of bone-snapping action in *Tekken*, but Yamaguchi takes it further than that. The big, bad boss of the big, bad corpora-

tion, who enjoys tossing infants off cliffs and laughing maniacally, is called Heihachi Mishima. Mishima! Of all the things to call your megalomaniac villain in search of world domination, only a writer with tongue firmly in cheek would dare to name him after Yukio Mishima, the suicidal author who in the late Sixties set up his own private army, glorified violence above thought, and wrote enthusiatically about the aesthetic appeal of nuclear war.

The anime pays lip-service to the police thriller angle exploited in the past by *Streetfighter*, casting Jun Kazama as a lady investigator with an international crime-busting syndicate. *Tekken* also throws in a zillion references to Bruce Lee movies. If you're going to do fighting, why not go to the master? Hence the martial arts tournament on a millionaire's private island, the promised fight through the floors of a central tower, and the Hong Kong setting which won't do any harm for the Chinese box office either. Even the dubbers at AD Vision get into the spirit giving HKPD officer Lei Wulong a distinctly Bruce-like warcry.

In another sneaky move, the entire plot seems to be aiming towards a massive fight at Mishima's lair, which would, of course, be the tournament featured in the game itself. But that would be too predictable. In fact, the events of the game take place off-screen for a few fleeting seconds, while the camera stays on the baddie's control room. One of the technicians reports that two characters have gone AWOL, and we're back in the thriller plot. Now that's classy, setting the whole thing up like that and then dumping the game itself from the story. In another sly touch, the technicians (whose point of view in the story would be exactly that of a Playstation player in front of a television) are later massacred. Take that, says Yamaguchi. How does it feel?

Tekken also throws in a zillion references to Bruce Lee movies. If you're going to do fighting, why not go to the master?

Smacking each other about is the only way to live. The musclebound heroes of *Tekken* have the bully's contempt for any solution that doesn't involve a good fight, killing each other like civilised people, one-to-one. The fist is the ultimate weapon, anyone caught using a knife or a garrotte is instantly branded a coward. Yeah. Softies.

Jun wanders aimlessy through the fight scenes, reminding all the characters that they should be nice to each other, while both good and evil characters talk of the power of rage. "Can you defend your truth with your fists?" demands the psychotic Kazuya (good guy) of his pious interrogator. With friends like these, who needs enemies? "Tomorrow I'm killing my father," says Kazuya, brightly, as if he'll be washing his socks the day after. But this is not a hole in the script, it's all quite deliberate, for Mishima is manipulating Kazuya's lust for revenge just as surely as he is twisting the genes of his biological weapons.

There is no right or wrong, we are told, you must "Reach for your truth and grab it with your Tekken [Iron Fists]." There's no sense of a just war here, there might as well be a neon sign in the tape box that says: "If you want fighting, here it is." In this regard, you can file *Tekken* alongside the *Mortal Kombat* movie as a film that delivers exactly what the players want, with none of that moral nonsense that interfering busybodies keep trying to inject. ●

***Tekken* is available in the US and UK from AD Vision.**

BONKERS PLOT QUIZ

Three of the anime/thriller staples in this list were just inserted as a joke and do not actually appear in *Tekken*. Can you guess which ones?

The answers can be found on page 53.

- Childhood Flashback
- Bad Dreams
- Sibling Rivalry
- Shower Scene
- Evil Corporation
- Female Assassin
- Rakish Fellow Agent
- Underground Hideout
- Private Island
- Psychic Girl Agent
- Graphic Breaking Bones
- Gentle Giant
- Girl in a Sailor Suit
- Winsome Waif
- Sticky-up Hair
- Broken Punchbag
- Baaad Dad
- Faustian Pact
- Incompetent Minions
- Sickly Child
- Confused Professor
- Russian Androids
- Stealth Dinosaurs
- Boxing Kangaroo
- Robot with Emotions
- Heroic Bloodshed
- Selfless Sacrifice
- Self-Destruct Sequence
- Baddie Lives to Fight Another Day

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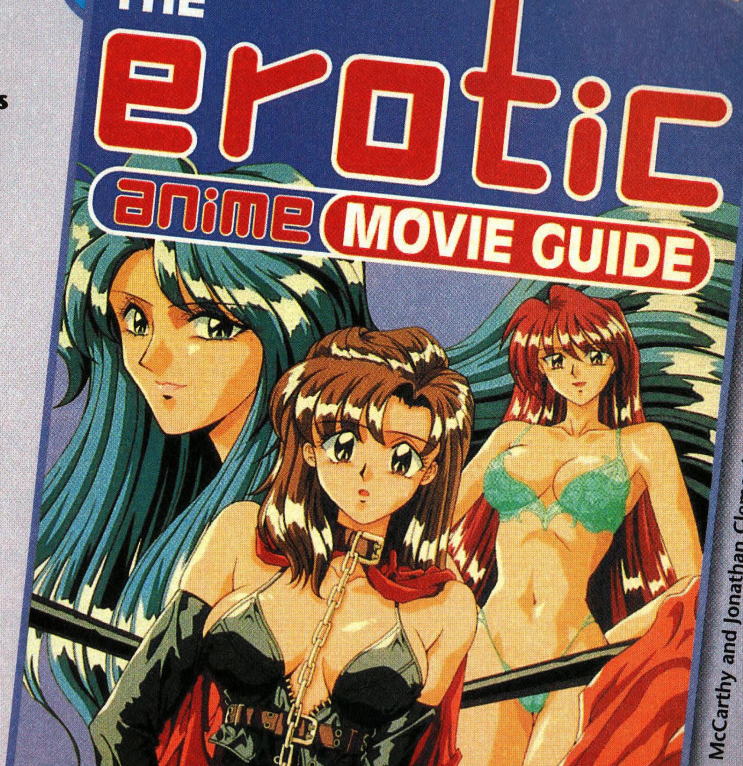


© 1998 Helen McCarthy and Jonathan Clements

WHO IS

MASTER KEATON

FALKLANDS VETERAN, IRANIAN SIEGE-BUSTER, INSURANCE INVESTIGATOR...

It's all over Japanese television, in a late night adult slot. It's a huge manga series from a famous creator. It's been described as Indiana Jones meets the A-team. So why does no-one know what it is? *Lee Brimmicombe-Wood* and *Motoko Tamamuro* investigate Master Keaton and its artist *Naoki Urasawa*.

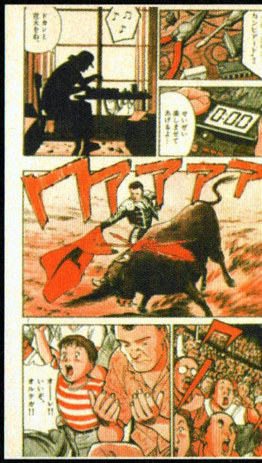
浦沢直樹

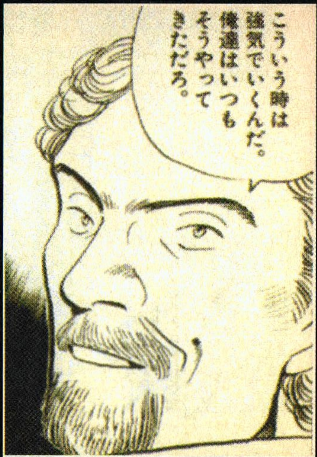
We first encounter Taichi Keaton at a third-rate Japanese university; a listless 35 year-old lecturer, way down the academic pecking order, teaching Archaeology to bored students. His pupils disrupt classes and walk all over him. "They don't wish to learn, so I don't see why I should teach them properly," he says.

It doesn't add up. It is hard to square this indifferent academic with another Keaton: former British Army Sergeant Taichi Hiraga Keaton, of the 22nd SAS Regiment. This half-English, half-Japanese ex-soldier was a special forces instructor; a hero of the 1980 Iranian Embassy siege in London; a Falklands War veteran; a master of survival. A killer.

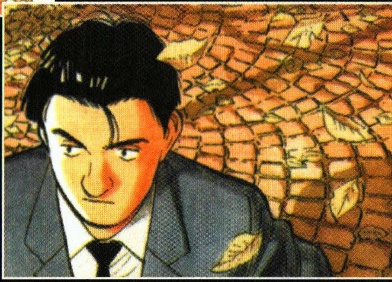
And yet there is another face to Keaton: the family man. The graduate of Balliol College who married his Japanese wife while still a student at Oxford before divorcing six years later. His delightfully sharp-tongued daughter, Yuriko, plots tirelessly to get her parents back together again. But despite the love she knows Keaton still holds for her mother, she can't completely fathom his response to her prodding. "Mother says if you had tried to stop her she'd never have left," she tells Keaton. "I don't like fighting," is his wistful reply.

Spanning 18 volumes and six years, Katsushika and Urasawa's comics story depicts a man travelling a path; a person coming to terms with himself. This is not "Indiana Jones meets James Bond" adventure hokum, but the thinking man's potboiler fiction. It is held loosely together by Taichi's second career. Earning a pittance as a lecturer, and living in the academic shadow of his ex-wife's professorship, Keaton moonlights as an investigator for the Lloyds insurance syndicates in London. Like so many elements of the comic, whose romanticised notions of England paint it as a land of Mini cars, double-decker buses and red-top tabloids, the writer's take on the London insurance markets is curiously askew. In the real-world Lloyds, the insuring underwriters are backed by the money of wealthy investors, known as Names. However, in Master Keaton, the Names themselves –all aristocrats, naturally– take on personal responsibility for paying out the policies, and hire Taichi to investigate any mysterious deaths. Working from his Baker Street office like a modern-day Holmes, Keaton travels the world and solves crimes with his wit and knowledge.

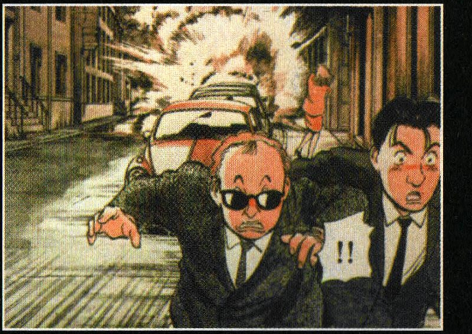

0:00
ワァァァァ
オーレ!!
いいぞ、オルテガ!!


こういう時は強気でいくんだ。俺達はいつもそうやってきただろ。

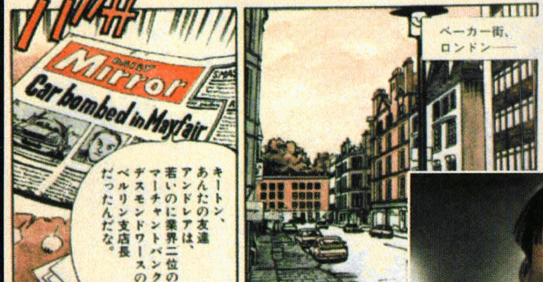
Like the best adventure heroes, Keaton is remarkably resourceful. But his military and survival training is only truly effective when allied with his scholarship. Keaton is a mud-grubbing archaeologist with a comprehensive knowledge of ancient civilisations. His ability to improvise survival gear and ancient weapons from found objects provide the creators plenty of opportunity to illustrate snippets of archaeology, history, myth and literature to their audience.



Keaton gets about; his travels take him across Europe and the Middle East. His world is full of cops, ex-SAS buddies, mercenaries, mafia dons, media moguls and politicos with murder on their minds. He is bombed, stabbed and shot at, but Taichi –this lethal man– only fights back when pushed to the limit.



Inevitably, it is Keaton's personal story that holds the interest most. Badgered by his teenage daughter, and mindful of the parallels with his father –a failed academic divorced from Taichi's English-born mother– Keaton must rebuild his life. He is an incurable dreamer; something which pushed him away from his wife when he was a young scholar, obsessed with discovering ancient civilisations. His divorce shook him to the core, leading him to join the British Army and serve a seven year stint. During his military career he tried to discipline himself, become a pragmatist, quash his dreams. "But I failed," he says. After leaving the Army he tried again to find a path for himself as a life assurance investigator, but the only place that led him was back to his true loves: his archaeological work and his family.

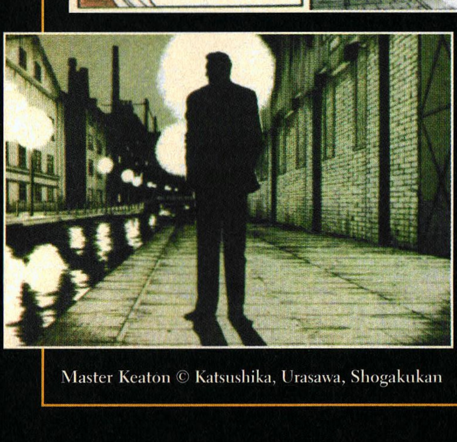

バサ
DAILY Mirror
Car bombed in Mayfair
キートン、あんたの友達アンドレアは、若いのに業界二位のマーチャントバンク、デスモンドワースのベルリン支店長だったんだな。
ベーカー街、ロンドン──

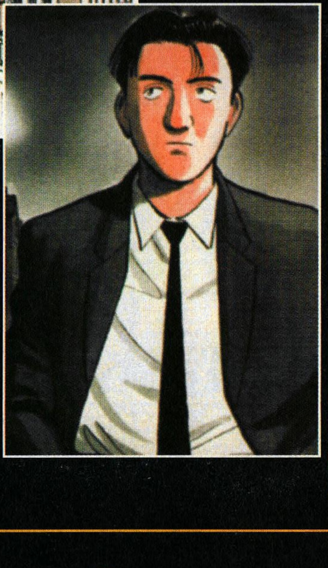
The final story was published in 1994 and provides closure to this personal story. It takes place in a Romania rebuilding itself after the rule of the despot Ceausescu. After being shot near to death in a squabble over the dictator's secret fortune, Taichi finally gets to accomplish his dream of digging for a great Danube civilisation. He also realises he's ready to reconcile himself with his wife, and he asks her to join him.

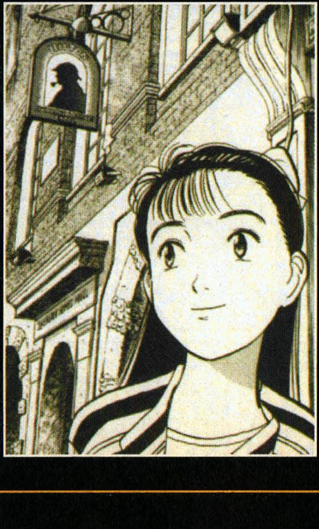
So, who is Master Keaton? Agent? Investigator?

No, a scholar and husband and father, that's who. ●

The *Master Keaton* anime, directed by Masayuki Kojima and overseen by Tatsuhiko Urahata, is currently showing on Japanese television.







Master Keaton © Katsushika, Urasawa, Shogakukan

He was one of the first manga authors to be published in English, but what happened next for Naoki Urasawa? By *Lee Brimmicombe-Wood* and *Motoko Tamamuro*

WHO IS
URASA

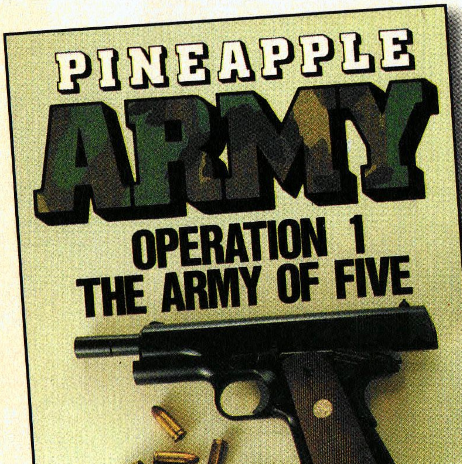
Naoki Urasawa is almost unknown in the West, despite having been published in English. The problem may be that he creates adult comics rather than the kind of juvenile offerings preferred by most Western manga readers. It seems odd that such a commercially successful creator could be sidelined in the Western market, and it speaks volumes about how English-language publishers have chased the lowest common denominator with material originally aimed at a younger audience.

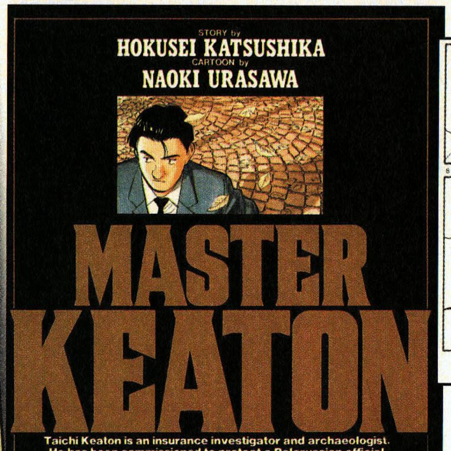
Urasawa's work is far from juvenile; he has been associated with Shogakukan's *Big Comics* family of publications throughout his career. *Big Comics* cater for male, adult audiences and Urasawa's work for them has consisted of a series of contemporary thrillers and sports stories notable for their intelligence and wit.

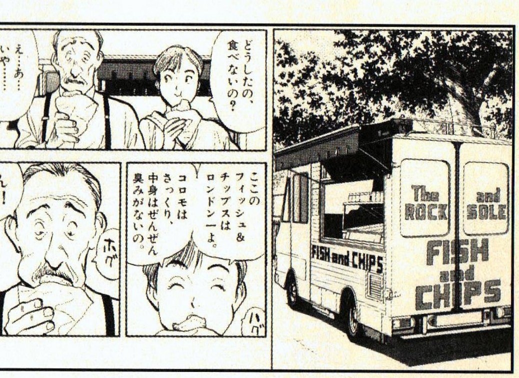
PINEAPPLE HEAD

Winning a Shogakukan new artists' contest in 1982, Urasawa graduated to professional comics in 1983 with his debut short story *Beta!!*. It wasn't until 1985, however, that he was granted his first series, working under the experienced tutelage of Kazuya *(Mai the Psychic Girl)* Kudo. This series was the eight-volume *Pineapple Army*, part of which was later published in English by Viz Communications.

Pineapple Army centres on Jed Goshi, a Japanese-American Vietnam veteran and grenades expert (the 'Pineapple' part of the title) making a living as a self-defence tutor. Gun-for-hire Goshi travels the worlds hot spots, taking on bandits, guerrillas and vicious killers. However, his mission is not to kill, but to help others protect themselves from harm.

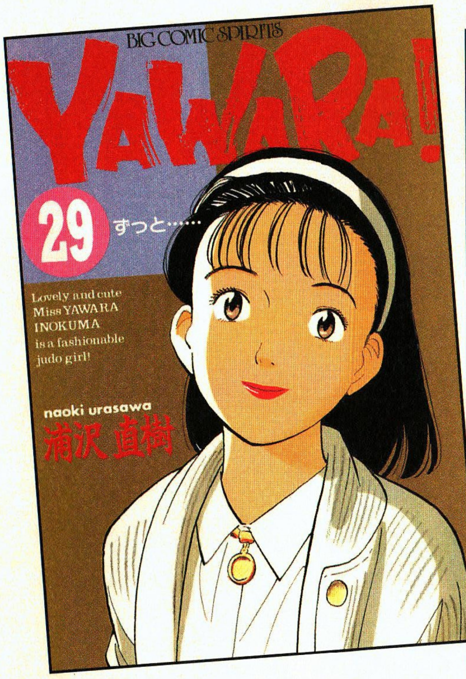

PINEAPPLE
ARMY
OPERATION 1
THE ARMY OF FIVE
Story by
KAZUYA KUDO+NAOKI URASAWA
Cartoon by
パイナップルARMY／五人の軍隊

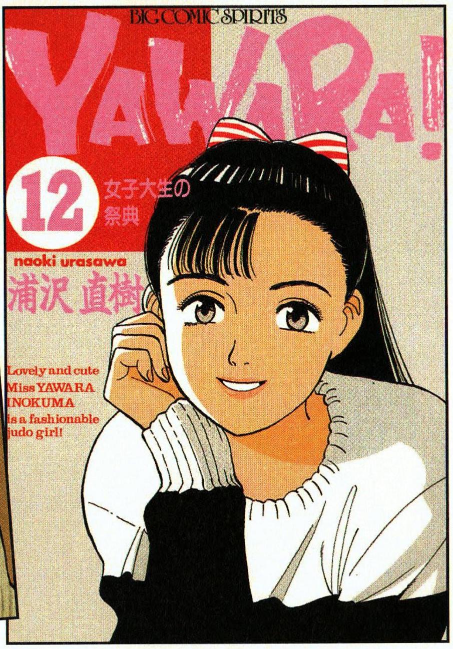

STORY by
HOKUSEI KATSUSHIKA
CARTOON by
NAOKI URASAWA
MASTER
KEATON
Taichi Keaton is an insurance investigator and archaeologist.
He has been commissioned to protect a Belorussian official
whose life has been threatened by an ex-KGB agent,
but as the struggle develops, an unexpected fact comes to light
This is the twelfth appearance of a mysterious hero!
DISCOVERY
12
КРАСНЫЙ ВЕТЕР
MASTERキートン 発掘:12 赤い風


どうしたの、食べないの？
え…あ…いや……
ここのフィッシュ＆チップスはロンドン一よ。
コロモはさっくり、中身はぜんぜん臭みがないの。
ん!!
ホグ
ハグ
The ROCK and SOLE
FISH and CHIPS

Jed Goshi is a typical Urasawa character; despite his tough, bluff exterior he is a sensitive soul. One of Urasawa's great talents is to communicate this sympathy and likeability through his visuals. Goshi, like Urasawa's other heroes Taichi Keaton and Matsuda Kosaku, is a compassionate individual – he cares deeply. This gentle quality is best shown in the story *The Five Dollar Bet* in which Goshi finds himself up against a co-worker with orders to stop him

NAOKI
AWA?


BIG COMIC SPIRITS
YAWARA!
29
ずっと……
Lovely and cute Miss YAWARA INOKUMA is a fashionable judo girl!
naoki urasawa
浦沢 直樹


BIG COMIC SPIRITS
YAWARA!
12
女子大生の祭典
naoki urasawa
浦沢 直樹
Lovely and cute Miss YAWARA INOKUMA is a fashionable judo girl!

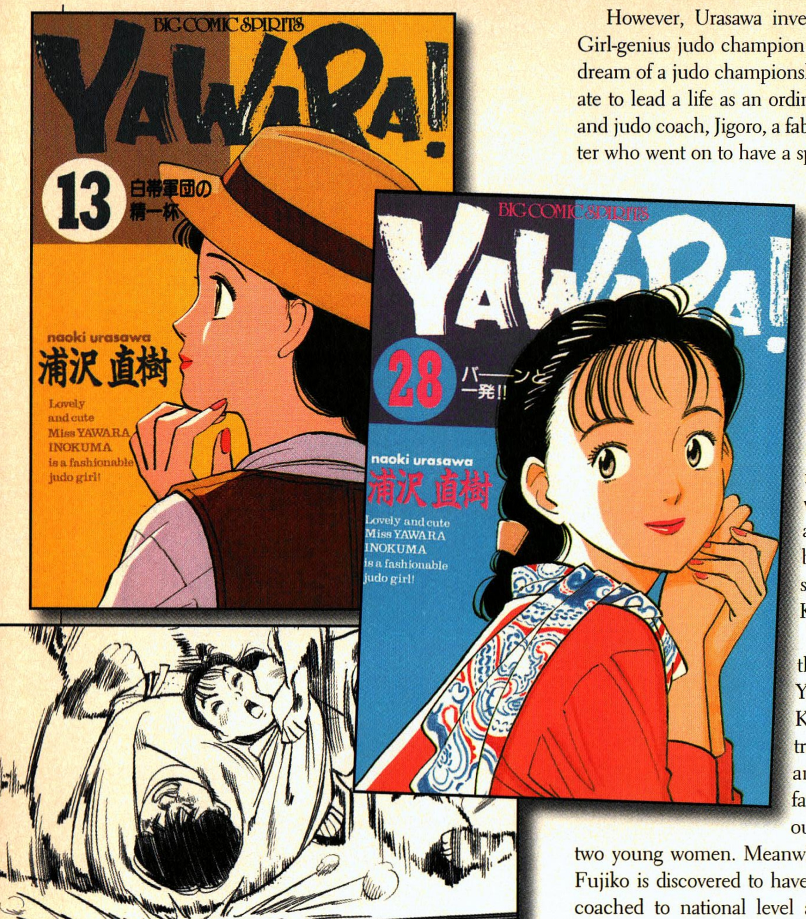
training soldiers. Goshi defuses the situation and saves a friendship with shrewdness, humanity and the minimum of violence.

THE ADJUSTER

Urasawa's late Eighties and early Nineties output is dominated by his two most famous works: *Yawara!* and *Master Keaton*. *Yawara!* was a weekly strip that began in Big Comic Spirits in 1986 and would run to 29 volumes, finishing in 1993. *Master Keaton* commenced in the bi-weekly *Big Comic Original* and ran for 18 volumes through to 1994.

Master Keaton, a collaboration with writer Hokusei Katsushika, was an intelligent airport-lounge thriller. Anglo-Japanese insurance investigator Taichi Keaton travels the world solving mysteries. (In fact, he mainly travels around Europe: with the exception of *Pineapple Army*, America and Americans rarely feature in Urasawa's stories.) In the meantime he has to put back together the remains of his private life. Keaton is an echo of Jed Goshi, though also a much more romantic and versatile figure.

Pineapple Army, which viewed the world through


BIG COMIC SPIRITS
YAWARA!
13
白帯軍団の精一杯
naoki urasawa
浦沢 直樹
Lovely and cute Miss YAWARA INOKUMA is a fashionable judo girl!
BIG COMIC SPIRITS
YAWARA!
28
バーンと一発!!
naoki urasawa
浦沢 直樹
Lovely and cute Miss YAWARA INOKUMA is a fashionable judo girl!

the same paranoid perceptions as the Reagan-era US State Department, *Keaton* is more politically astute strip. For instance, stories involving Northern Ireland are dealt with in an incredibly sensitive manner, while one of the most interesting tales concerns a conspiracy around the Falklands War. Senior members in the British establishment attempt to silence a media exposé of the reasons behind Margaret Thatcher's decision to recover the Falkland Islands in 1982. Both these stories feature actual people, or characters that resemble them. The Falklands story includes corrupt British media magnate Robert Maxwell (who died around the time the strip was published), while the Ireland stories feature a figure very much modelled on Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams.

THE GENTLE JUDO GIRL

Yawara!, on the other hand, was Urasawa's first solo series and concerns the world of women's Judo. At first aquaintance, the strip reads like a variation on the *Lisa the Lonely Ballerina* theme – a girl's comics story template that goes by other names elsewhere. The essential elements of the *Lonely Ballerina* story are there: a young girl, orphaned or estranged from her parents must overcome personal doubts, adversarial relatives and rich-bitch rivals to achieve her goal in dancing, music, horse-riding, or as in this instance, judo.

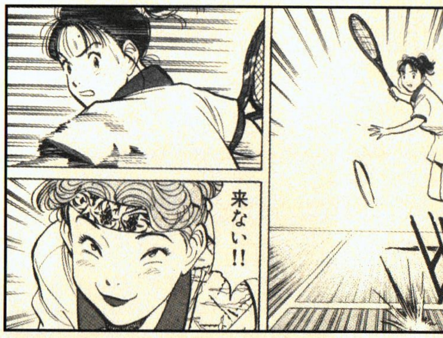
However, Urasawa inverts the story completely. Girl-genius judo champion Yawara Inokuma doesn't dream of a judo championship, but is instead desperate to lead a life as an ordinary girl. Her grandfather and judo coach, Jigoro, a fabulously colourful character who went on to have a spin-off manga of his own, is determined not to let her sink into mediocrity. By hook and crook he drives her to greatness. Urasawa throws in a love triangle for good measure: cute little Yawara has captured the hearts of two men – smooth playboy Kasamatsuri and scruffy cub sports reporter Matsuda – which only serves to anger her rivals, rich-bitch Sayaka and busty sports photographer Kuniko.

Parallel stories run throughout the strip. Yawara's estranged father Kojiro reappears to help train arch-enemy Sayaka, and a conflict between father and son is played out in proxy between the two young women. Meanwhile, homely college pal Fujiko is discovered to have a talent for judo and is coached to national level and an Olympic medal chance.

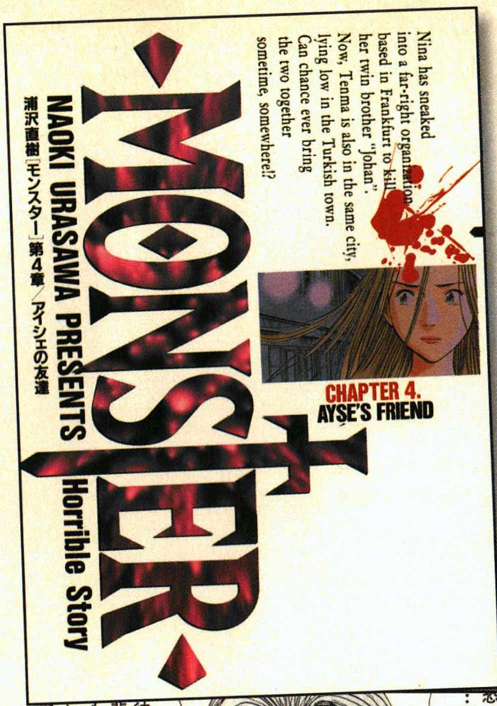
This heady mix of sports and romance makes for a superior soap opera which, like the best kitchen-sink soaps, runs in real time. Beginning in 1986, the strip covers the events as Yawara enters the Seoul Olympics demonstration in 1988, the World Championships in Yugoslavia in 1990, and the Barcelona Olympics in 1992. Urasawa is smart enough to allow all his characters to grow; Yawara starts as a high-school graduate, goes to college and finally gets a job promoting a travel and hospitality business.

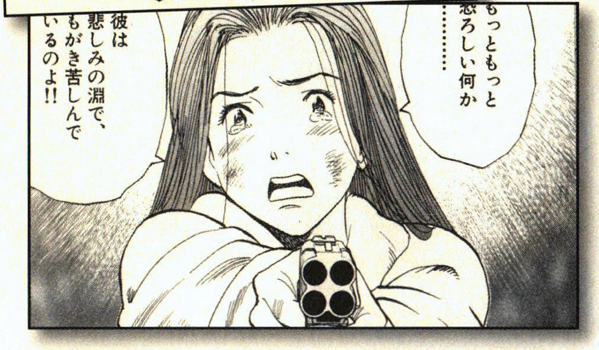
Despite the soap-level romantic fantasy, there is a realism at the heart of *Yawara!* which binds the strip together. Urasawa is very knowledgable about judo and earths it in the real politics of the sport. Much of the early storyline is about Jigoro's attempts to convince the Japan Judo Federation and the International Olympic Committee to allow an unlimited weight category in the women's competition. Also, Jigoro's attacking style of judo – he only accepts unquestionable *ippon* wins – is shown to have its weaknesses. Later, the collapse of the Soviet Union affects the career of Yawara's Russian rival, the fearsome Tereshkova

The multiple storylines show up some of Urasawa's shortcomings. The meek-but-strong Yawara and her rival Sayaka are the shallowest of all the characters, and as the story progresses it becomes clear that Urasawa has discovered the limitations of these creations. So instead he mines the rich seam of life in his supporting cast, such as love-rat Kazamatsuri's attempts to get Yawara into bed, Fujiko's relationship with big-lug athlete Hanazono, and father Kojiro's attempts not to destroy his daughter, but to create an opponent strong enough to truly challenge her. *Yawara!* is also a very funny strip, with Jigoro stealing every scene he appears in. By the end, Urasawa's art had become very slick, without losing any of the fluidity of his early work. The action scenes in the strip are masterfully rendered, with the judo motion beautifully captured.

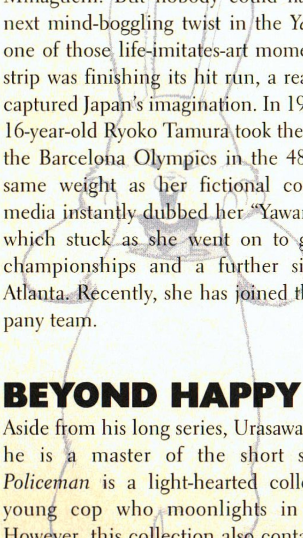


NAOKI URASAWA PRESENTS
Happy!
浦沢直樹
Volume 4 BOOING!!
4
NAOKI URASAWA PRESENTS
Happy!
Volume3 Pro Debut!
3
浦沢直樹


Nina has sneaked into a far-right organisation based in Frankfurt to kill her twin brother "Johan". Now, Tenma is also in the same city, lying low in the Turkish town. Can chance ever bring the two together sometime, somewhere!?
MONSTER
NAOKI URASAWA PRESENTS
Horrible Story
浦沢直樹「モンスター」第4章／アイシェの友達
CHAPTER 4.
AYSE'S FRIEND


もっともっと恐ろしい何か……
彼は悲しみの淵で、もがき苦しんでいるのよ!!

It was only a matter of time before *Yawara!* jumped to the small screen, and in 1989 it became an anime television series. Chief director was Hiroko Tokita, better-known today for Pioneer's reincarnation fable *Nazca*, with assistance from Junichi *(AirBats)* Sakata and two *Lodoss War* directors: Katsuhisa Yamada and Akio Sakai. The script was provided by Toshiki *(Dirty Pair)* Inoue, and Yawara herself was played by Yuko *(Luna Varga)* Minaguchi. But nobody could have forseen the next mind-boggling twist in the *Yawara!* story. In one of those life-imitates-art moments, just as the strip was finishing its hit run, a real-world Yawara captured Japan's imagination. In 1992, diminutive 16-year-old Ryoko Tamura took the silver medal in the Barcelona Olympics in the 48 kg class – the same weight as her fictional counterpart. The media instantly dubbed her "Yawara-chan", a title which stuck as she went on to gain two world championships and a further silver medal in Atlanta. Recently, she has joined the Toyota company team.



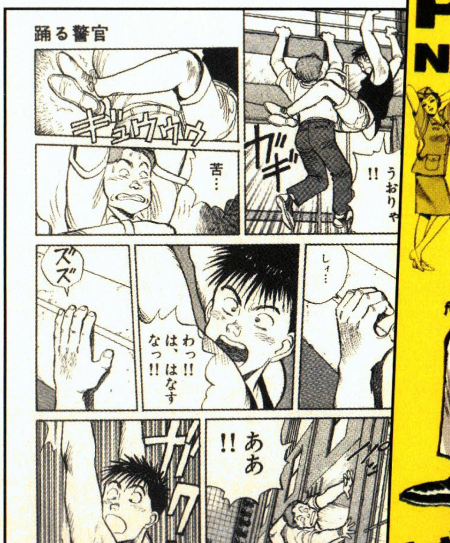
BEYOND HAPPY

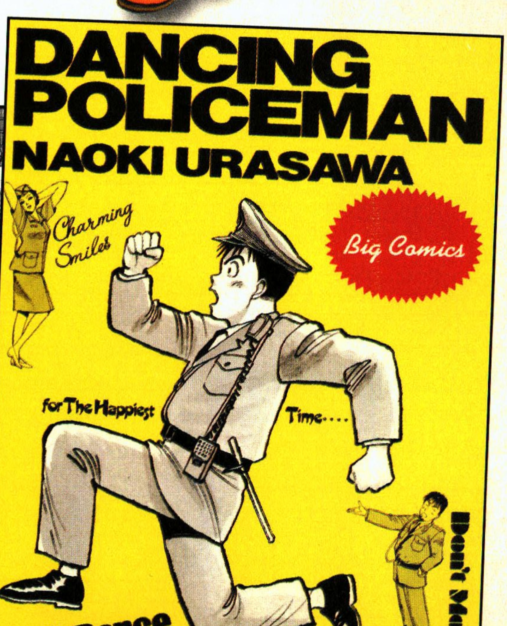
Aside from his long series, Urasawa has also shown he is a master of the short story. *Dancing Policeman* is a light-hearted collection about a young cop who moonlights in a rock band. However, this collection also contains the masterful *Goodbye Mister Bunny*, a story which reads like *Die Hard in a Rabbit Costume*, only with a genuinely tearjerking ending. *NASA*, or *Nippon Amateur Space Association*, is another collection of shorts, many of which concern a bunch of middle-aged salarymen who share the unattainable dream of going into space aboard a home-built rocket.

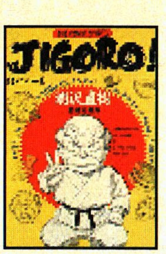
Post-*Yawara!* and *Keaton*, the prolific Urasawa continues to pump out two stories simultaneously. Starting in 1994, *Happy!* is a recapitulation of *Yawara!*, only in the world of women's tennis. Yawara-clone Miyuki Amino, orphaned daughter of tennis champions and inheritor of her parents "magic shot", is forced to enter professional tennis to repay her missing brother's multi-million yen debt. Unusually for Urasawa, this strip fumbles the ball, copping out of the integrity of its predecessor and descending into sentimental sports fantasy, hitting heavily on the romantic aspects of the plot. Not that this has hurt the success of the series. At the time of writing (the 20th volume), Miyuki is competing at Wimbledon and suffering the usual hideous love-complications.

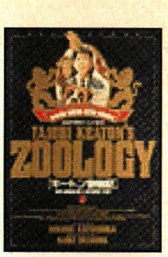
Far more interesting than *Happy!* is *Monster*, which currently stands at 10 volumes since it began in 1995. The first non-sports series Urasawa has written himself, this psychothriller crosses Len Deighton's spy blockbusters with Ira Levin's *Boys From Brazil*. Surgeon Dr Tenma is chased across Europe by Interpol, suspected of being a serial killer. The real murderer is a young man named Johan, the psychotic product of East German genetic experimentation. Johan is a truly monstrous figure, viewed with messianic fervour by neo-Nazi groups. He must be killed, and Tenma hunts him down in Czechoslovakia aided by Johan's twin (and decidedly unmonstrous) sister Nina.

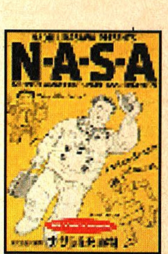
As a suspense story, *Monster* is a masterful work. Urasawa references his sources very well, and the elliptical storytelling is genuinely intriguing. Full of excitement and atmosphere, this is his most sustained piece of work to date.


踊る警官
ギュウウウ
ガギ
苦…
うおりゃ!!
ズズ
しィ…
わっ!! は、はなすなっ!!
ああ!!
ガクッ

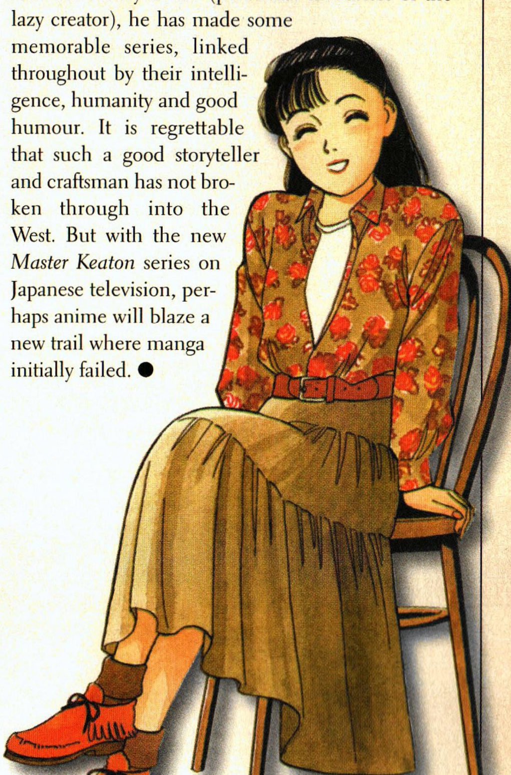

DANCING POLICEMAN
NAOKI URASAWA
Charming Smiles
Big Comics
for The Happiest Time....
Don't Move.
Let's Dance Together!
「踊る警官」浦沢直樹


JIGORO!
浦沢直樹


MASTER KEATON'S
ZOOLOGY



Overall, Urasawa's work is solidly crafted entertainment. Without having to dip into easy genres such as fantasy or SF (perennial favourites of the lazy creator), he has made some memorable series, linked throughout by their intelligence, humanity and good humour. It is regrettable that such a good storyteller and craftsman has not broken through into the West. But with the new *Master Keaton* series on Japanese television, perhaps anime will blaze a new trail where manga initially failed. ●



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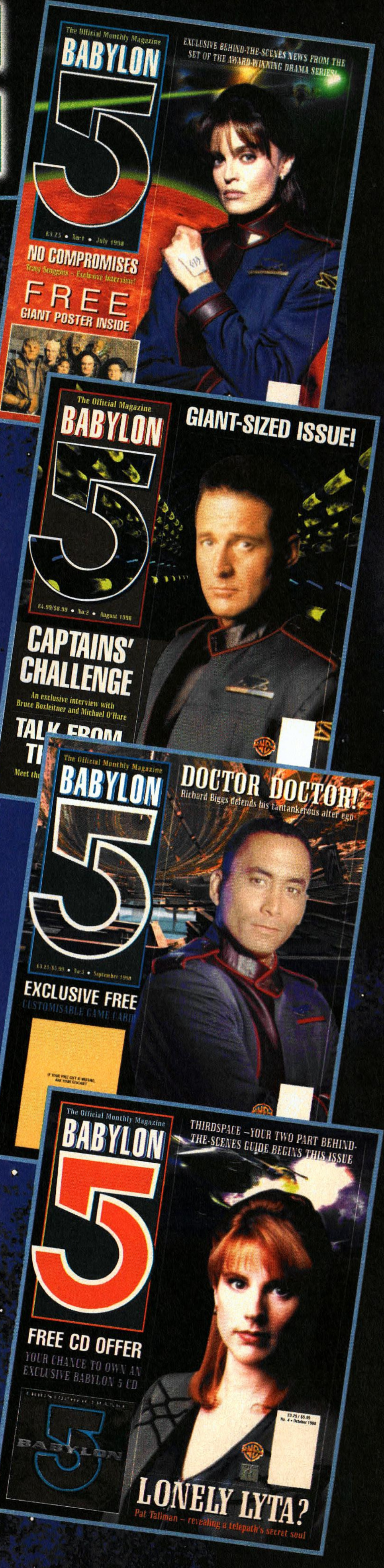
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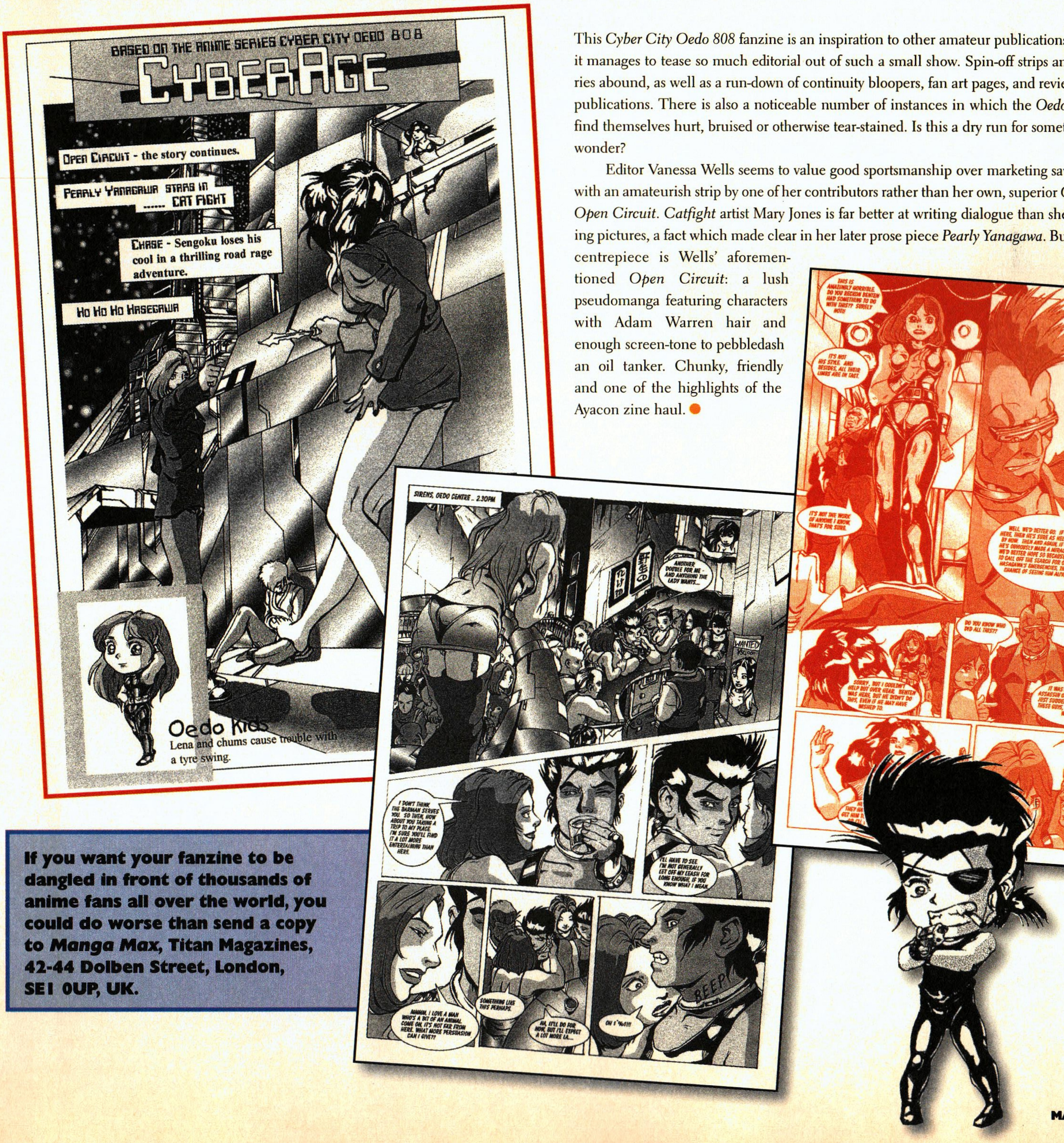
FAN Scene

Lucky old *Cyber City*. Such a tiny series with such a productive fan following. Lucky old *Julia Sertori* gets to put her feet up, put the CD player on, munch on munchies and think of pretty boys with these two fanzines.

CYBERAGE #2

This *Cyber City Oedo 808* fanzine is an inspiration to other amateur publications in the way it manages to tease so much editorial out of such a small show. Spin-off strips and short stories abound, as well as a run-down of continuity bloopers, fan art pages, and reviews of other publications. There is also a noticeable number of instances in which the *Oedo* characters find themselves hurt, bruised or otherwise tear-stained. Is this a dry run for something else, I wonder?

Editor Vanessa Wells seems to value good sportsmanship over marketing savvy, leading with an amateurish strip by one of her contributors rather than her own, superior *Oedo* comic *Open Circuit*. *Catfight* artist Mary Jones is far better at writing dialogue than she is at drawing pictures, a fact which made clear in her later prose piece *Pearly Yanagawa*. But the proud centrepiece is Wells' aforementioned *Open Circuit*: a lush pseudomanga featuring characters with Adam Warren hair and enough screen-tone to pebbledash an oil tanker. Chunky, friendly and one of the highlights of the Ayacon zine haul. ●



BASED ON THE ANIME SERIES CYBER CITY OEDO 808

CYBERAGE

Open Circuit - the story continues.

Pearly Yanagawa stars in ...... Cat Fight

Chase - Sengoku loses his cool in a thrilling road rage adventure.

Ho Ho Ho Hasegawa

Oedo Kids

Lena and chums cause trouble with a tyre swing.

SIRENS, OEDO CENTRE .. 2.30PM
ANOTHER DOUBLE FOR ME - AND ANYTHING THE LADY WANTS...
WANTED
I DON'T THINK THE BARMAN SERVES YOU. SO THEN, HOW ABOUT YOU TAKING A TRIP TO MY PLACE. I'M SURE YOU'LL FIND IT A LOT MORE ENTERTAINING THAN HERE.
I'LL HAVE TO SEE. I'M NOT GENERALLY LET OFF MY LEASH FOR LONG ENOUGH, IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN.
BEEP
THIS IS AMAZINGLY HORRIBLE. DO YOU RECKON BENTEN HAD SOMETHING TO DO WITH THIS?? SURELY NOT!!
IT'S NOT HIS STYLE. AND BESIDES, ALL THEIR LIMBS ARE IN TACT.
IT'S NOT THE WORK OF ANYONE I KNOW THAT'S FOR SURE.
DO YOU KNOW WHO DID ALL THIS??
SORRY, BUT I COULDN'T HELP BUT OVER HEAR. BENTEN WAS HERE, BUT HE DIDN'T DO THIS, EVEN IF HE MAY HAVE WISHED TO.

If you want your fanzine to be dangled in front of thousands of anime fans all over the world, you could do worse than send a copy to *Manga Max*, Titan Magazines, 42-44 Dolben Street, London, SE1 0UP, UK.

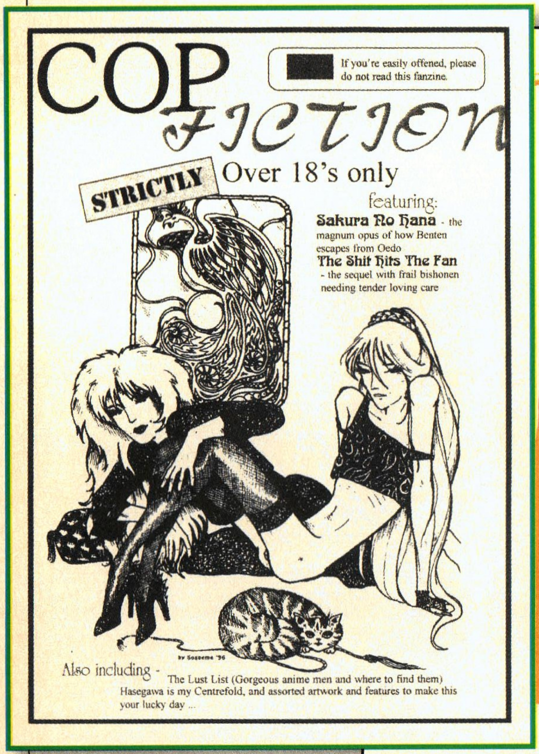
COP FICTION #1

Cop Fiction is the best in its field, its field being that of naughty fan fiction about *Cyber City Oedo 808*. Some might say this is a simple matter of taking your favourite characters and then slotting them into random sentences containing the words tear-stained, bruised, and hurt. There are certainly parts of *Cop Fiction* that do this, though it also features bikini wax bondage (aah... the *suffering*), sexual assault and a lot of baths. There's a joke about the male inability to do laundry, and there are even elves and dragons. In fact, just add a couple of cats, a box of chocolates, and a few braying laughs about willies to have everything you need for a fangirl night in.

But it's hardly the corrupt festival of filth I'd been led to expect. Remove a bit of potty talk and a couple of explicit moments, and most of the content could have easily been included in another fanzine like, say, *CyberAge*. As prose, it's way above average, though average is increasingly difficult to define in the void created by the *Cajun Sushi Bar*. The two long stories are sinuously sensual and occasionally pornographic. The art is more so, to the extent of Steve Kyte (and a priapic Hasegawa) as you've never seen him before.

But those few pages that are not part of the *magna opera* seem little more than filler. There's nothing *that* risqué about a *Cyber City* drinking game or a list of favourite anime blokes. Then again, I can't really resist a zine that contains the phrase "...his surly rescuer seemed to understand neither Spirithial, English nor Welsh." If you're bored with sexist wish-fulfilment written by men, you can always try sexist wish-fulfilment written by women.

Ah. I've just found a cat in it as well. That's nice. ●



COP FICTION

If you're easily offended, please do not read this fanzine.

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The Shit Hits The Fan - the sequel with frail bishonen needing tender loving care

by Sosseme '96

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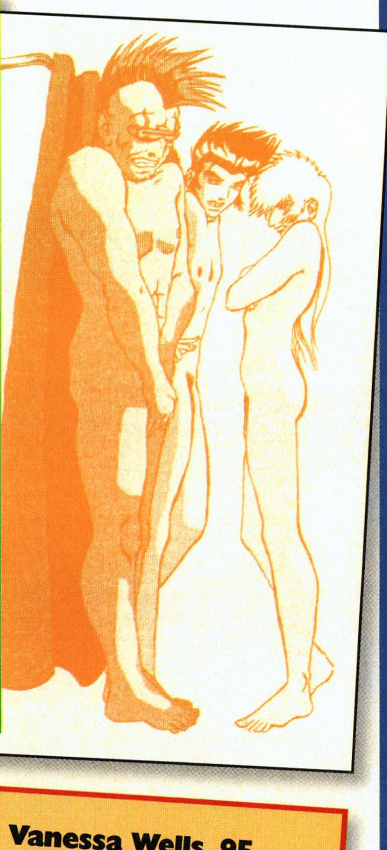

***CyberAge* is available from Vanessa Wells, 95 Rosemary Avenue, Braintree, Essex, CM7 2TB, UK (snarx@aol.com). £2.50 inc. p&p. The publishers of *Cop Fiction* have asked us not to print their address in the magazine.**

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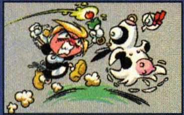

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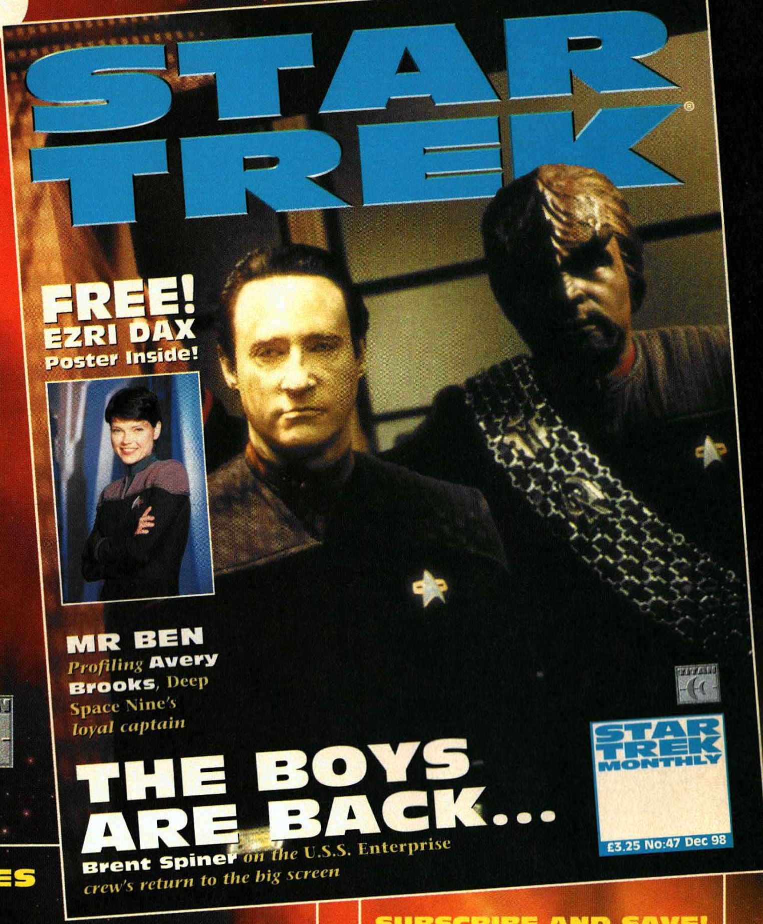
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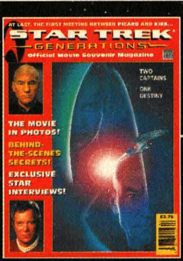

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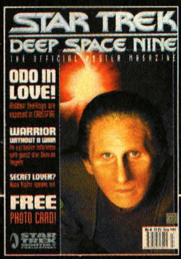

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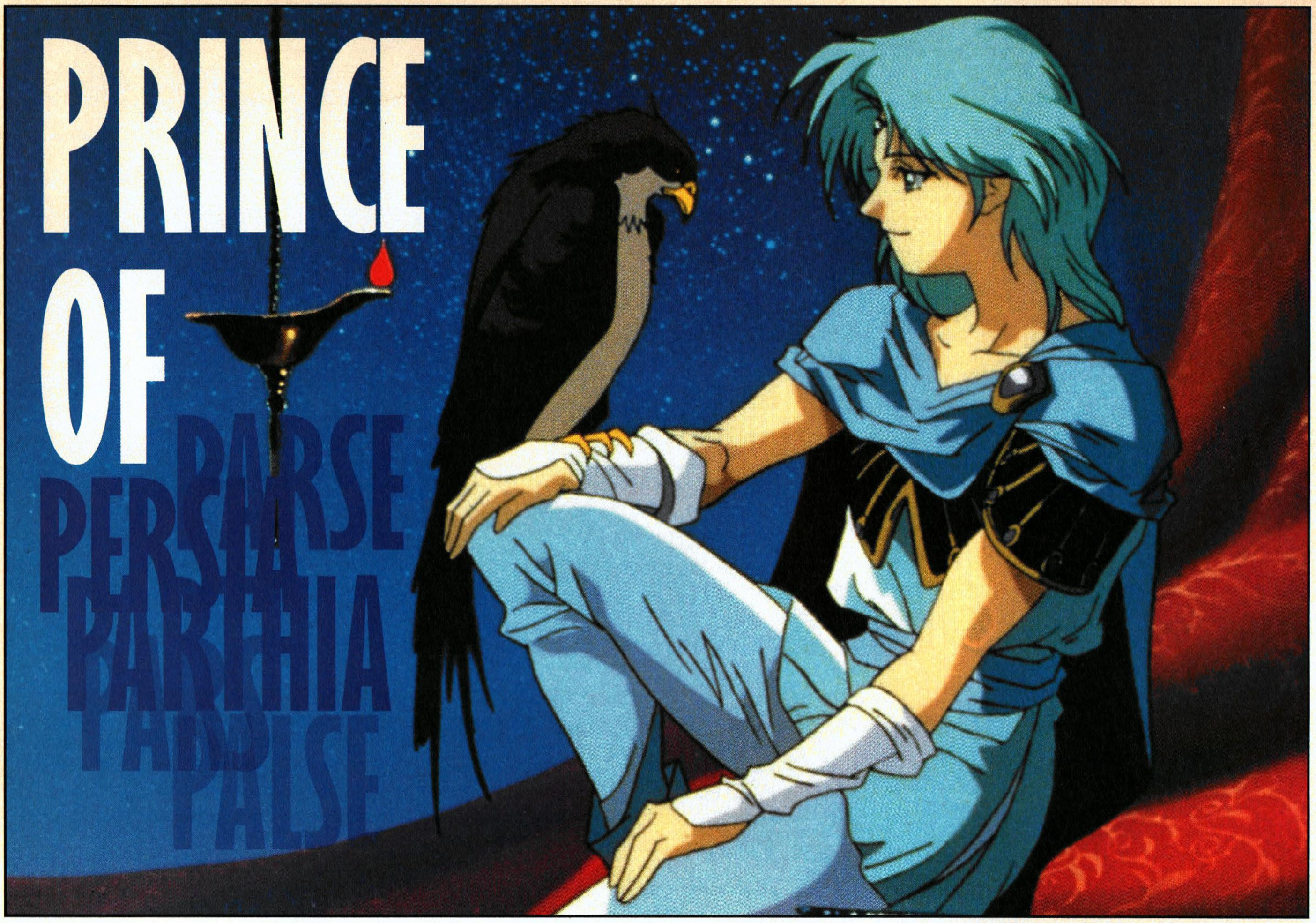
PRINCE OF PARSE PERSIA PARTHIA PALSE



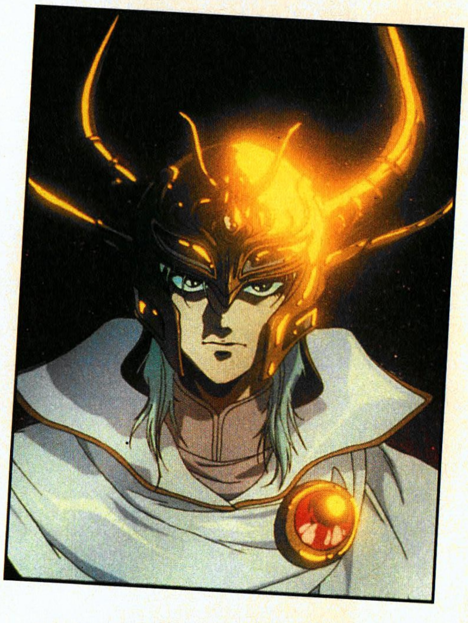
Confused? You will be, as *Fred Patten* tracks the tortuous translations and counter-translations of *Arslan*. (aka Arislan)

Some stories, like *Kiki's Delivery Service*, slip easily into an anime adaptation, but most successes tend to be in the children's market. When it comes to adult books, there's simply too much to cram in, and the anime suffers (*Darkside Blues*, for example). A different set of troubles haunt *The Heroic Legend of Arslan*, a video series now in the hands of its second English-language distributor, and forced to adopt a different English voice-cast and translator.

An anime adaptation of Yoshiki Tanaka's fantasy novels, *Arslan* is set in a world similar to Robert E. Howard's *Conan* stories. Howard blended in a colourful assortment of exotic names from Celtic, Roman and Middle Eastern history, and set them in a mythical, forgotten prehistoric civilisation. Tanaka's saga hews more closely to the Persian Empire at the time of its conquest by Alexander the Great. But instead of the Greeks, the Western neighbour of "Palse" is "Lusitania" (the Roman name for Portugal), ruled by King Inokentis VII (as in Pope Innocent VII), on a holy war to conquer Central Asia.

> **"The confusion is worse ... thanks to discrepancies and changes in characters' names and translations."**

Arslan, Palse's 14-year-old prince, escapes when the Palsian army is defeated. A handful of loyal nobles help him build the resistance against the conquering Lusitanians (vicious parodies of medieval crusaders). Additional complications are caused by the eastern neighbours (thinly disguised India and Turan) which try to expand their own borders at Palse's expense, and by the mysterious Lord Silvermask, who is actually Prince Hermes, heir to a rival branch of the royal family.



The confusion is worse than that, thanks to discrepancies and changes in characters' names and translations. In part one, King Andragoras of Palse (also spelled or pronounced Pulse, Parse and Pars on different videos) meets the invading Lusitanian (or Rucitanian) army and is crushed at the battle of Atropatene, due partly to an evil spell cast by a wizard in Silvermask's service. Arslan (or Arislan) escapes, not knowing what happened to his father. The viewer is shown that Andragoras is captured by Silvermask, who is pretending to help the Lusitanians. After capturing Palse's capital Ekabatana (the traditional English spelling is Ecbatana), Silvermask and the Lusitanians throw Andragoras into the dungeon of his own palace.

Part one ends with a narrator's voice over. On the subtitled version, this reads "Andragoras, king of Palse, had vanished from the earth. In his absence, his kingdom began to crumble. A mighty nation had been destroyed. In the year 320, Palse fell." But on the

dubbed version, the narrator says: "And here we take our leave of our valiant warriors for the time being. Not long after, in the year 320 of the Palsian calendar, Andragoras III died of an illness, much to the diasappointment of Hermes, who could not carry out his vengeful threats. However, the once-great kingdon of Palse was firmly in the hands of its enemies."

Does this make a difference? You bet it does! In the last half of *Age of Heroes*, Andragoras escapes from the Lusitanians and takes command of the Palsian resistance back from Arslan (a potential disaster, because Andragoras is a totally incompetent general). If you saw the subtitled version, this presents no problem; but if you saw the dub you've been told he's dead!

There are other important differences. Kharlan, one of Andragoras' trusted generals, betrays the Palsians and joins Silvermask. No explanation is given in the dub; the implication is that he is the dastardly traitor that a good drama needs. But the subtitled version adds a significant comment when Silvermask says to his wizard, "Your spell made Kharlan loyal to me..."

Some of these differences are, believe it or not, deliberate. *Age of Heroes* begins with an explanation from Central Park Media that they have changed the spellings and pronunciations of the major characters' names because "We have been requested to do so by our Japanese licensor, KSS, who explained that the original producers prefer the spelling..."

And so Daryoon becomes Darun, Gieve becomes Guibu, and so on. It may be moot as to which of two phonetic spellings of a Japanese-pronounced Persian name is more correct, but Hermes, a well-known Greek name, has become Hirumeez. That may be closer to the Japanese pronunciation, but it is not "good English".

The production quality in *Age of Heroes* is notably inferior to the previous episodes. Previously, the battles have featured actual animation. Here they are presented as a series of fast cuts among about half a dozen dramatic paintings of warriors fighting. The editing has become confusingly abrupt. Scene: Arslan and his advisors agree that they must deceive the Turanians. Scene: A new character, a Turanian spy, is reporting to his king that Arslan is a young fool and that the Palsian army is disorganised. Since this is clearly untrue, what is going on? Have the Palsians somehow deceived the spy (who would have to be an idiot), or is the spy actually working for the Palsians? There are several scenes where the viewer must guess at the motivation behind events, and hope that it will be explained later. The chances are, unfortunately, high that it has already been explained, between the covers of the *Arslan* novels, and that any viewer unfamiliar with them will flounder unaided. ●

"Hermes, a well-known Greek name, has become Hirumeez. That may be closer to the Japanese pronunciation, but it is not 'good English'."

***Heroic Legend of Arslan: Age of Heroes* is released in the USA by Central Park Media. Manga Entertainment, the UK distributors of the previous Arslan episodes, have not announced any intention to distribute the new episodes in the near future.**

ARSLAN MADE EASY (?)

In Japan, episodes one and two of *Arslan* were released in cinemas in 1991 and 1992. Episodes three and four, each only half an hour long, were released straight to video in 1993, directed by *Macross 7*'s Tetsuro Amino.

After a two-year hiatus, Hamatsu retook the reins, and episodes five and six were released as the two chapters of *Arslan: A Lone Figure on a Warhorse*.

In the USA, parts one and two appeared as videos in 1994, followed by parts three and four as a single tape in 1995. Now the next two episodes have appeared together as *The Heroic Legend of Arslan: Age of Heroes*. The new subtitle implies that *Age of Heroes* is a separate, complete story. Actually, the video sleeve lists these two parts in the small type as episodes five and six. Yes, it is a continuation of the same serial. It is so dependent on the earlier events that it needs a four-minute (!) synopsis at the beginning to set the scene. And an hour later, it stops upon another cliff-hanger! Since there are currently no more videos in Japan, fans may have to wait for a translation of Tanaka's novels to find out how the story ends.

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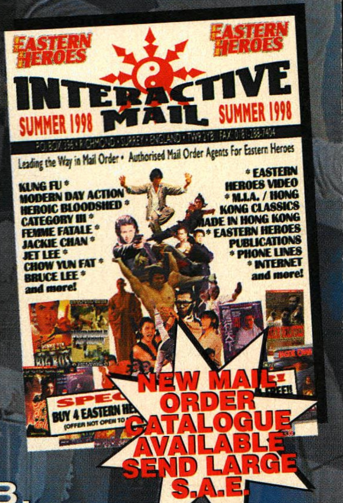
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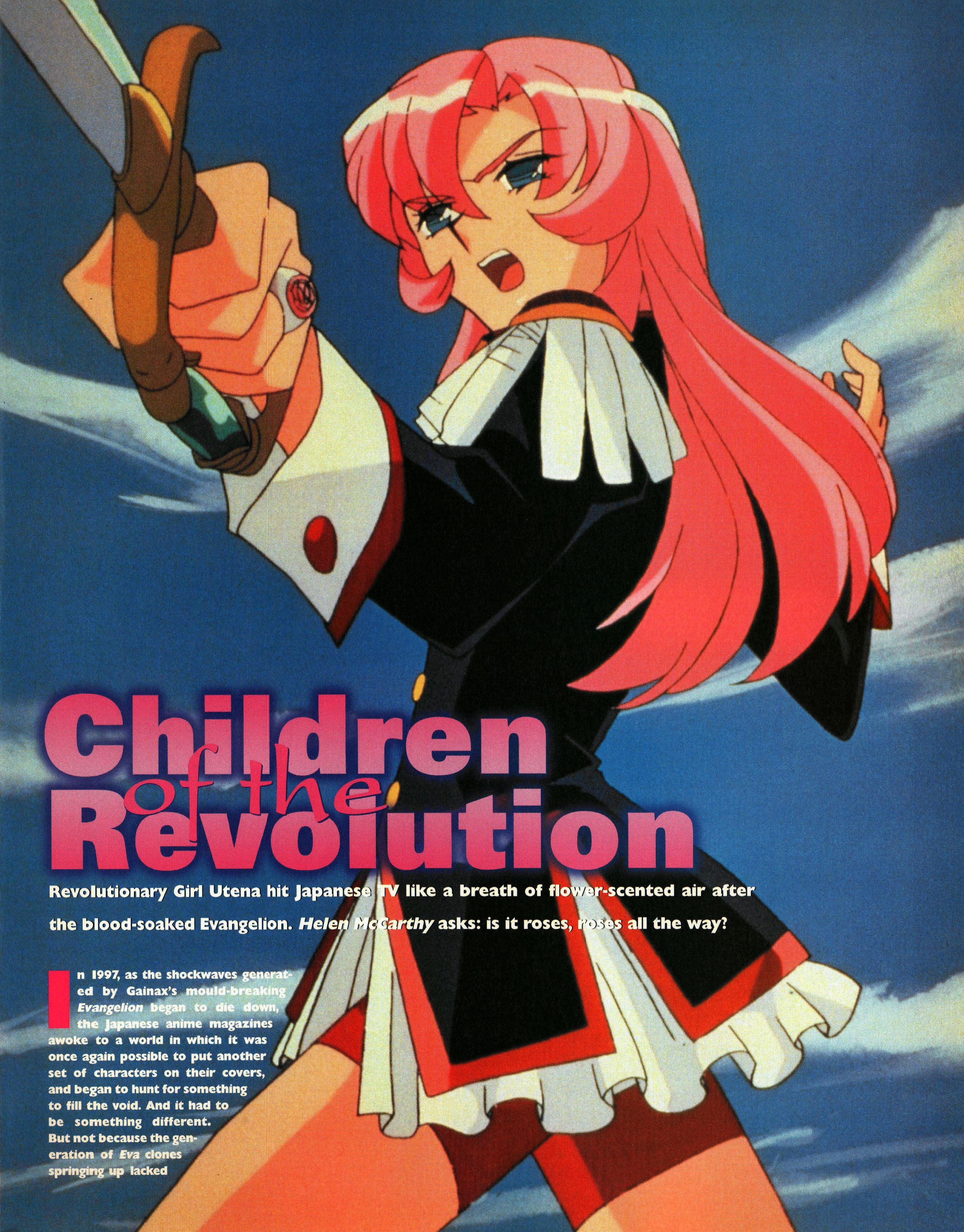
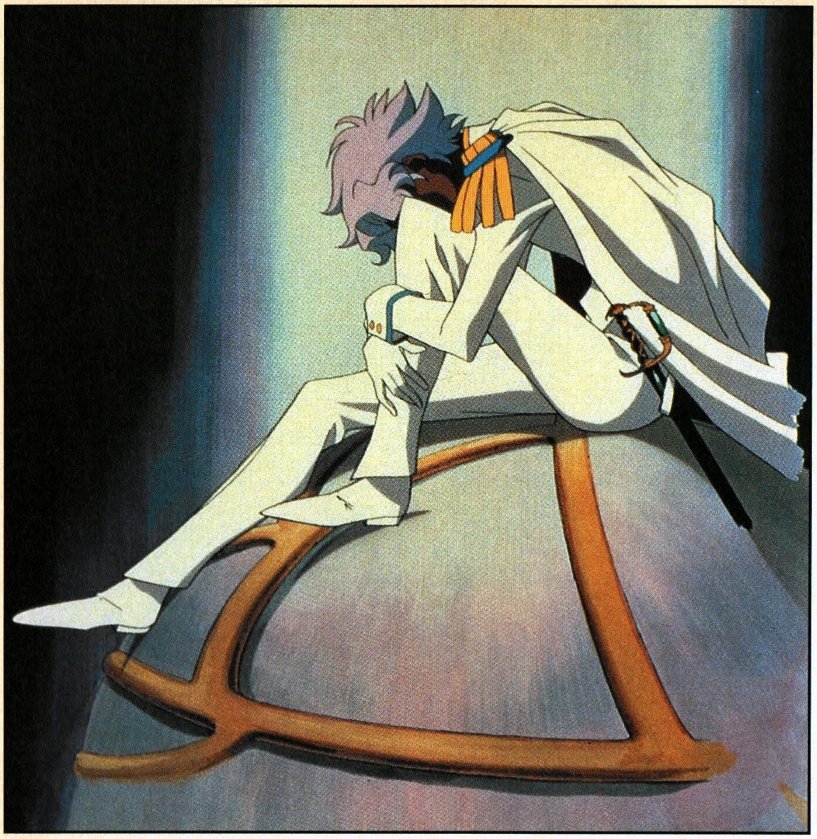


Children of the Revolution

Revolutionary Girl Utena hit Japanese TV like a breath of flower-scented air after the blood-soaked Evangelion. *Helen McCarthy* asks: is it roses, roses all the way?

In 1997, as the shockwaves generated by Gainax's mould-breaking *Evangelion* began to die down, the Japanese anime magazines awoke to a world in which it was once again possible to put another set of characters on their covers, and began to hunt for something to fill the void. And it had to be something different. But not because the generation of *Eva* clones springing up lacked



Utena © 1998 B-BABAS/Chiho Saito/TV Tokyo/Shonen Iinkai

the twisted inspiration or desperate drive of the original; the motive was much less complex.

Anime magazines sell themselves on their covers. Obviously they want to carry the most popular series, but they also want to be the first to break the Next Big Thing, and to give a helping hand to the anime companies by drawing in new fans as well as keeping the existing ones interested. So the Next Big Thing had to look as unlike *Eva* as possible. It had to be striking, sexy, colourful and playful. And along came *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.

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新世紀エヴァンゲリオン
150th

For months it dominated the covers and lead features of the three major anime magazines – zappy *Animedia*, thoughtful *Animage* and the legendary *Newtype*, which over the years had broken such hits as *Patlabor* while maintaining its original loyalty to the many incarnations of *Mobile Suit Gundam*. Heroine Utena was nothing like the broken blossoms of *Eva*; she was cute, sexy, forthright and positive, utterly convinced that some day her prince will come. She wore striking outfits without a trace of bandages, blood or vomit and she didn't mind being surrounded by roses of the non-dead, non-thorny variety. The story piled in girls, school uniforms, swords, cross-dressing, neo-European settings, intrigue and romance. To any foreign distributor looking for a new hit show, *Revolutionary Girl Utena* had it all: looks, style and a great media buzz.

The Origin of Species

Because the anime market, like all film media, continually renews itself with the birth of new fans, true classics are often placed on a high shelf, their lofty status guaranteed but their many delights untested by those young enough to demand something fast and sexy. There have been mega-hits before *Eva*, and there have been fighting, cross-dressing females before *Utena*, but when new fans watch them they sometimes complain that the technique creaks and the pace crawls. The trick for producers is to find something which has obvious and exploitable roots – a classic storyline, a writer's or director's pedigree, a link to something that has already worked – but to give it the latest twist.

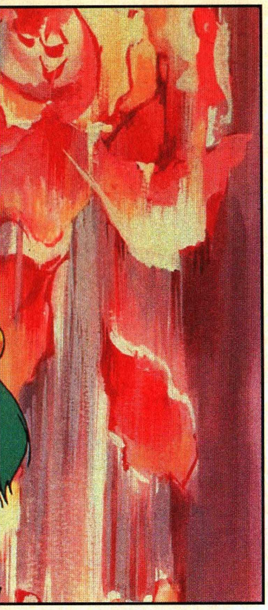
Utena's plot antecedents go back to the great Osamu Tezuka and *Princess Knight*, which itself was born from the Takarazuka theatre troupe, a uniquely Japanese cultural phenomenon known by reputation even to those who have never seen a performance. The obvious echo is of *Rose of Versailles*, manga creator Riyoko Ikeda's sublime fantasy of love and revolution. The manga is so well plotted and written that commentators were referring to it with respect before most Westerners knew what a manga was, and the television series earned its accolades by breathing motion and colour into Ikeda's lines while respecting every nuance of her creation, in particular its fine emotional shading.

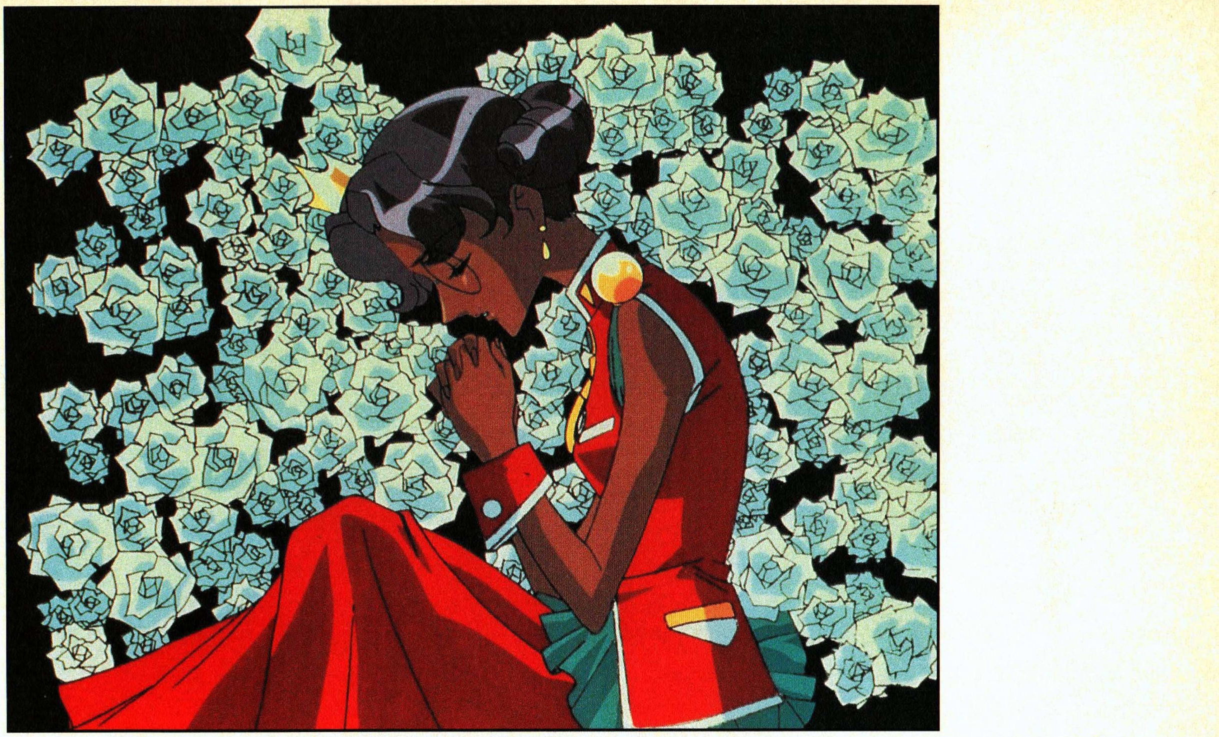
Evolution

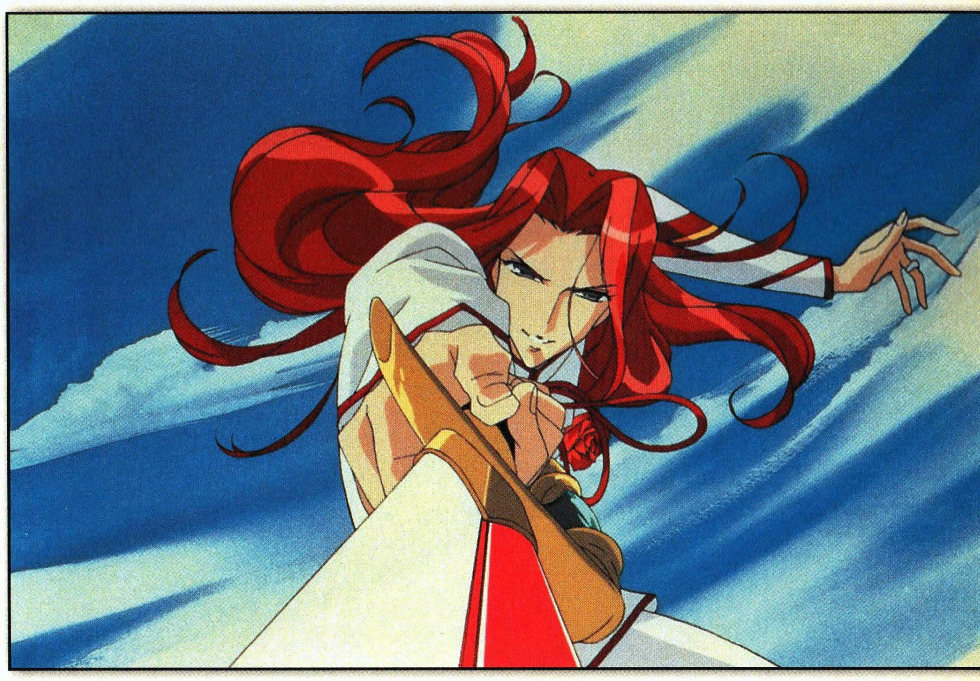
But we're all children of our age, strive as as we may, and a television series approaching its twentieth birthday has many rivals for influence on creators and marketeers at the end of the millennium. The Western distributors, Software Sculptors, are making much of *Utena*'s connection with Bandai's mass-market merchandise generator *Sailor Moon*, whose power in the Japanese little girl's market still persists and which won a loyal following in the United States, though this is arguably somewhat different from its target market at home. On closer inspection, though, this connection is fairly tenuous. Supposedly from "the team who brought you *Sailor Moon*", *Utena* boasts neither *Sailor Moon*'s creator Naoko Takeuchi, nor original director Junichi Sato. It does feature the series director Kunihiko Ikuhara, but if we're looking for roots, maybe we should look outside anime altogether.

Supposedly from "the team who brought you *Sailor Moon*", *Utena* boasts neither *Sailor Moon*'s creator Naoko Takeuchi, nor original director Junichi Sato

Far more interesting are the links to Western visual culture. The framing and cutting are reminiscent of a wide range of







comedy and sitcom stereotypes dating as far back as the title cards and cut-out frames of the Twenties. The characters resonate with Americana from the mostly harmless *I Love Lucy* to the wholly pernicious *Ally McBeal.* Seekers after catchy straplines should consider combining those two rather than *Sailor Moon* and *Rose of Versailles*.

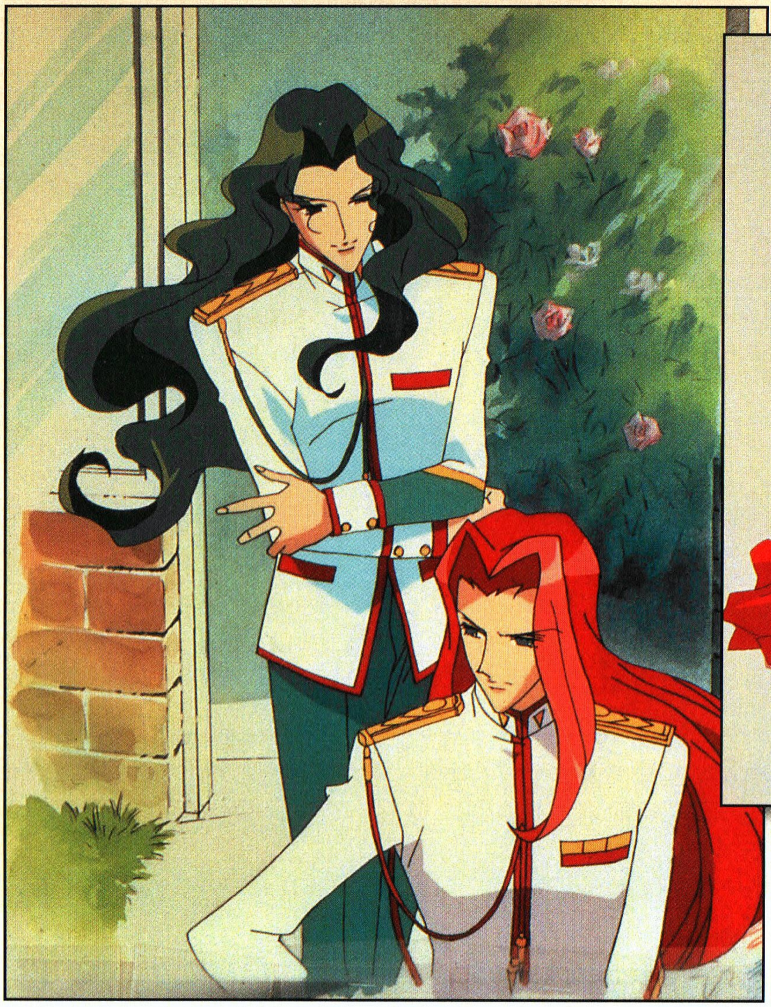
When Utena, who has spent a considerable amount of time telling us she wants to be a prince and rescue the princess, responds to Anthy's insistence that they are engaged with: "I'm a totally normal girl", I hear McBeal's whine: "of course I want to change the world – I just want to get married first." And when Nanami goes after the innocent Anthy, I see McBeal's feeble yet dogged pursuit of her happily married former love. Sisterhood schmisterhood; this new, assertive yet tender female is just a variant on Lucille Ball's loveable klutz, helpless, hopeless and pointless without a man (and a marketing machine) in her life.

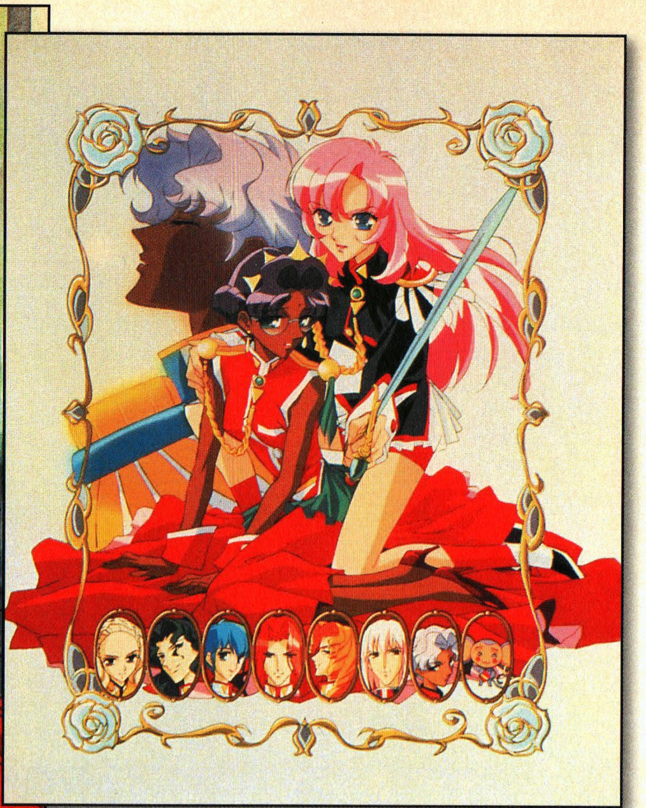
Although, like *Sailor Moon*, *Utena*'s manga was created for and ran in a comic anthology for girls under ten, its animators and Western distributors alike can't have been wholly unmindful of the leap made by *Sailor Moon* once it reached television and cinema screens. They are, after all, conditioned by the prime time television and video market where teenage boys are big spenders. Little girls love posters and dolls but they are not generally massive consumers of model kits. There's a whole new market on the other side of the shining screen, and many of its consumers are older and with more buying power than the original audience.

Convolution

In the first couple of episodes, director Kunihiko Ikuhara delivers a format not unlike a Paris catwalk show. As a girl, we are told, Utena lost her parents, but remembers being comforted by a gallant prince on a white horse. The impressionable child never forgot the prince's kindness, and reolved when she grew up to become, no, not a princess, but a prince herself. Now she is the fencing doyenne of Otori Academy, the curviest tomboy to refuse to wear a sailor suit. Now all she needs is a damsel in distress.

There are lots of ideas thrown in, many derived strongly from the past, some new, some clever, some that don't quite work out and some that are completely unwearable. The long climb up to the duellists' platform is repeated each time Utena goes to fight, echoing the 'launch sequences' of Japanese giant robot shows; second time around there's even a magical costume change. Ikuhara also drives into a number of minor plotholes – for instance, if students at Otori College don't get their dorm assignments until the second night of term, where are Utena and her ditzy friend strolling so casually and confidently on the first night? And the constant stylistic chopping is visually akin to being on a boat on the high seas: you never know where the next new wave will take you. By the third





episode Ikuhara has begun to settle down and realise that, just because you *can* do anything you like in animation, you don't have to. He starts to select the tricks that work for him (the shadow-play exposition sequences, for example) and discard the ones that don't.

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11

A number of potentially interesting subplots have sprung up around the main strands of Utena's search for her Prince and the shadowy political motives of the secret organisation End of the World (whose chances of world revolution may be hampered by the fact that they still send all their orders by letter – the revolution got lost in the mail.) Utena's klutzy pal, who starts out stupid, displays unexpected strength of character over a romantic disappointment. Just when you're so annoyed with Anthy you want to shake her till her pretty, passive teeth rattle, she hints at what may prove to be a wicked sense of humour. The gentle pianist Miki has a lost sister. The elegant, oh-so-cool President of the Student Council, who fancies Utena, has one you'd do your best to lose. She's set on stopping any girl getting her claws into big brother and also on making Anthy the school scapegoat.

There are also some wonderfully observed cameos of playground life and pre-teen romantic fantasy. At least one of the writers on this team knows how kids, particularly girls, think and dream. The wildly improbable sequence in which Nanami imagines more and more humiliations for Anthy and triumphs for herself, only to come off worst every time, and the behaviour of her nasty little cohorts who blame Anthy for every boy-related slight and disaster to befall the female population and demonstrate how gossip can be a weapon of aggression, give me hope for future episodes. When the nasty Saionji is politely informed that Anthy, whom he treated vilely, put up with it out of duty and not love, and now her duty has changed it's goodbye, his sheer bafflement is a perfect rendition of many a real-life response, and points to possible subtleties in the story which may take it far over the heads of its target audience.

> **"Will Utena, like Ally McBeal, begin to view the feminist revolution as something that distracted her from dating at an important stage?"**

The central plot, though, is the most interesting of *Utena*'s plot strands. What will happen when she finally realises that she has devoted her life to becoming what most men fear – competition? Will Utena, like Ally McBeal, begin to view the feminist revolution as something that distracted her from dating at an important stage? Will she try to change who she is to become what he wants her to be? Will he, romantic and magnificently improbable idea though it may be, accept her exactly as she is because he loves her? Will Anthy's way of doing what you have to, keeping quiet and making a secret life in your own heart, prove to be the only way to function in a world where men and women make war not love? Will *Utena* truly follow in the footsteps of *Sailor Moon*, which delivered something far above its expected potential in story as well as merchandising terms and proved to have an appeal beyond the plotted market areas?

Utena's mid-term report is, like that of its heroine, not as superb as everyone at first assumed but not at all bad. *Rose of Versailles* (or *Eva*) it isn't, but I hope for interesting developments in the future. The Next Big Thing may have more to offer than its fashionably hectic trimmings suggest. ●

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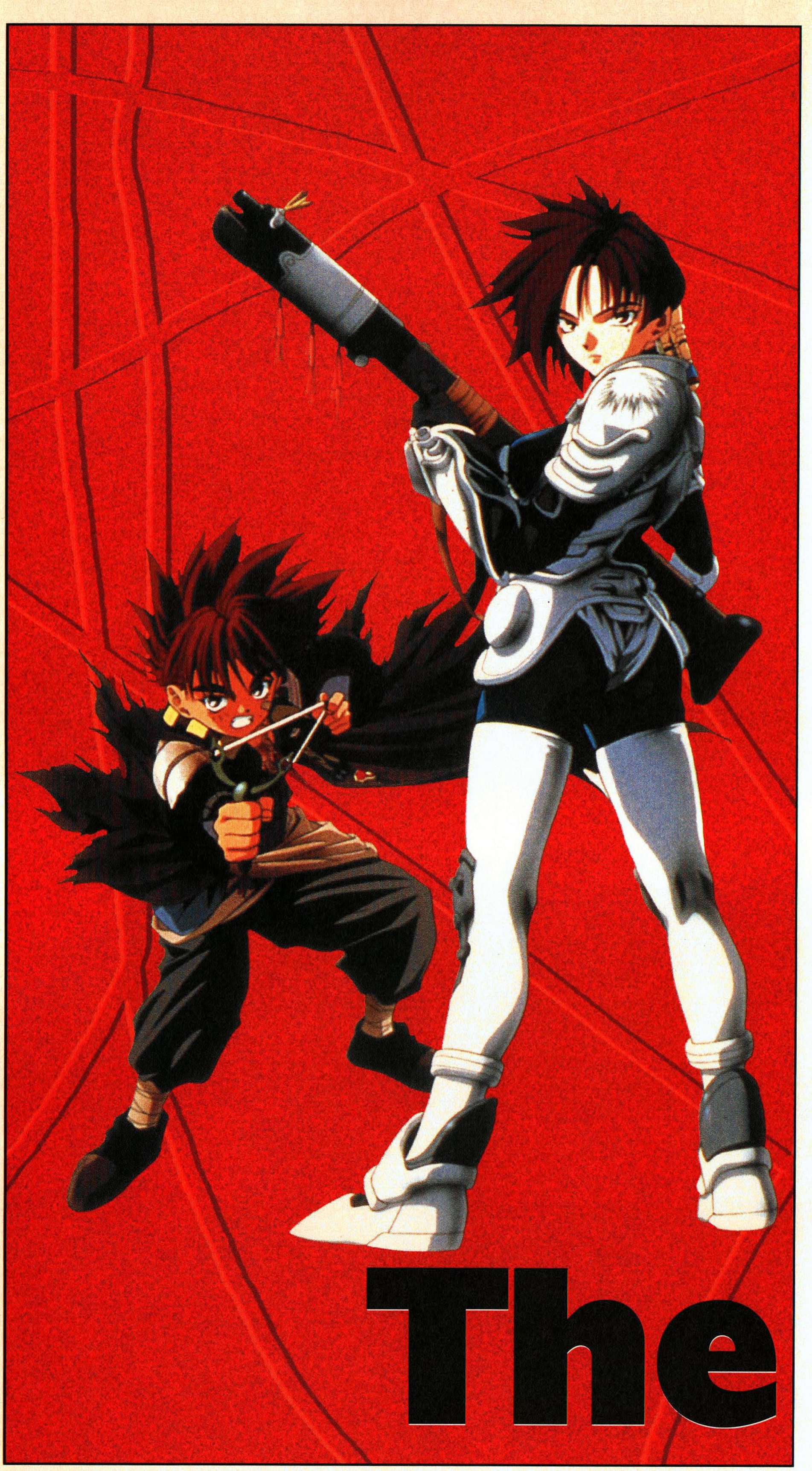


The *Iria*

What links Moon of Tao to Video Girl Ai? *PJ Evans* answers, for those of you who haven't looked at the title yet.

She's an alien bounty hunter, armed with an arsenal of exotic weaponry and a license to bring the galaxy's most dangerous criminals to justice. He's an unstoppable bio-weapon, a bullet-proof monster with a carnivorous *noh* mask and a habit of absorbing both weaponry and victims to make himself stronger. Together they made the transition from live-action special effects movie to animated video series and back again, and in the process became a hub of entertainment connections that stretch clear from *Mobile Suit Gundam* to *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers* and beyond...

The heart of this unlikely tangle lies back in 1991 with *Zeiram*, a low-budget science fiction movie co-written and directed by Keita Amemiya. The plot of the film centred around the exploits of bounty hunter Iria (played by Yuko Moriyama), whose plans to trap the monstrous Zeiram in a fake Japanese town are jeopardised by a pair of hapless engineers who get dragged in with her. *Zeiram* made enough of an impact back in Japan for Amemiya and co-writer Hajime Matsumoto to make another stab at the story, but this time in an animated format.

"The choice of Tetsuro Amino as director on the animated *Iria* was a wise one: Amino had been directing anime since he was 26"

Thus a six-part video series was released as *Iria: Zeiram the Animation*. Freed of budgetary constraints, director Tetsuro Amino was allowed to take the story and run with it. The resulting animation is a prequel, set three years before the events of the movie, and instead of being restricted to a single replica Japanese town, now sprawls from vast space freighters to alien worlds and cities full of bizarre technologies. More characters are introduced, and the handful of rubber monsters in the original are replaced by an army of icky clones, causing a degree of carnage that would bankrupt a live-action studio.

The choice of Tetsuro Amino as director on the animated *Iria* was a wise one: Amino had been directing anime since he was 26, when he got the top job on the TV series *Goshogun*. After that he moved away from the science fiction field for a while, working on a number of very different projects including the utterly bizarre *Mr Ajikko*, a children's show about martial arts, gourmet cookery and quite often a combination of the two. The next big title on Amino's hit list was the animated version of Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*, which came out in 1988 (check out MM44 for more details). That got him a string of jobs on various *Gundam* shows before he started work on *Iria* five years later. More recently Amino has returned to the world of *Gundam*: after the untimely death of Takeyuki Kanda, Amino took over as the producing director and editor of *Mobile Suit Gundam: The 08th MS Team*, also directing short *Gundam* history segments released with each of the 11 volumes.

In 1994 Amemiya returned to live-action with the bigger-budget (although still a bargain by Hollywood standards) *Zeiram 2*. The movie makes a small nod to *Terminator 2* by starting off with Zeiram working alongside Iria, but reprogramming soon had the *noh*-faced monster up to his old tricks. Amemiya, never one to shake up a winning formula too much, continued the theme with *Zeiram 3* in 1997.

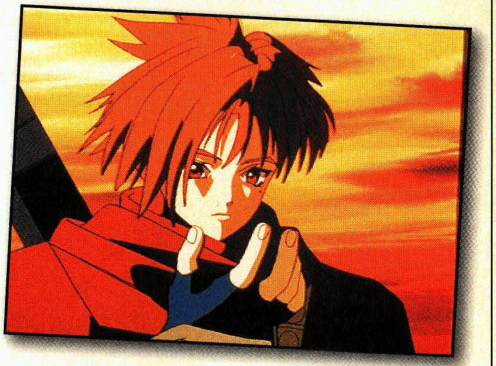
On *Iria*, Keita Amemiya supervised the visual concept while Amino got on with the directing. In 1988, while Amino was working on *Starship Troopers*, Amemiya had designed costumes for the *Kamen Rider Black RX* TV series, and directed *Future Ninja* (released in the USA as *Cyber Ninja*). *Zeiram* came three years later, and a year after that he began working on what will probably be his best-known work to Western viewers: the show that Saban Entertainment would turn into *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers*.

Amemiya continued his work on sentai shows, directing *Kamen Rider ZO* in 1993 and acting as cinematographer on *Kamen Rider J* in the following year. In 1995 he released *Mechanical Violator Hakaider*: this film is noted by computer buffs as being edited entirely on an Apple Macintosh, using the *Adobe Premiere* software. After that came *Zeiram 3* and *Moon of Tao* (also featuring the charms of Iria actress Yuko Moriyama), both in 1997.

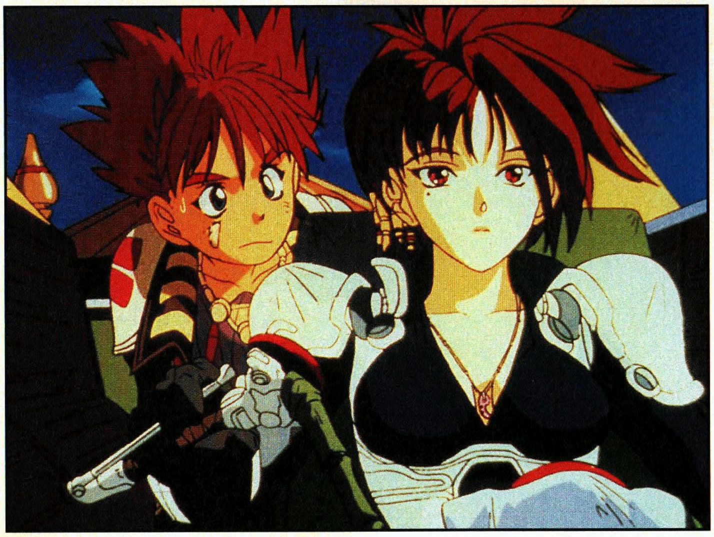
"...a year after that he began working on what will probably be his best-known work to Western viewers: the show that Saban Entertainment would turn into *Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers.*"

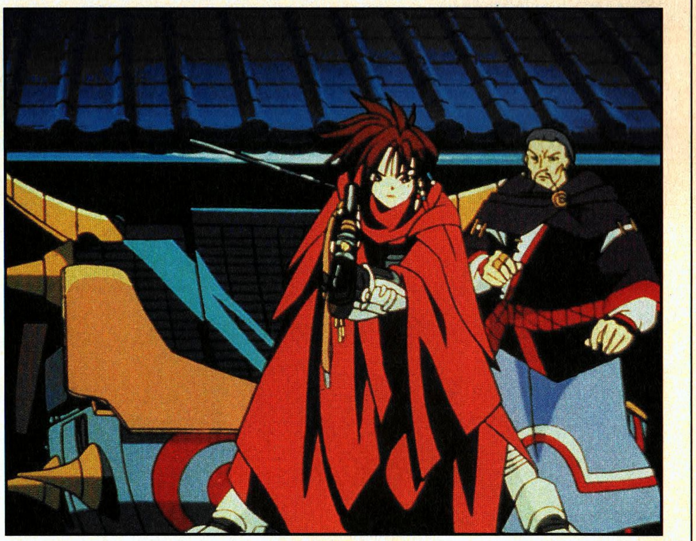
One of the most memorable things about *Iria* is the character design – little wonder, given that this aspect of the production fell to Masakazu Katsura. In this case, the links extend in two directions, since it was while Katsura was watching Amemiya's *Future Ninja* that he was inspired to write *Shin no Shin*, a one-off manga story which lead to the creation of *Video Girl Ai*. The list goes on: *Iria*'s unique musical score was composed by Yoichiro Yoshikawa, who also wrote soundtracks for *Green Legend Ran* and *New Dominion Tank Police*. Lead voice actress Aya Hisakawa has spoken the words of more anime characters than it is feasible to name, including *Sailor Moon*'s Queen Beryl, the eponymous *Devil Hunter Yoko* and Reen in *Elf Princess Rane*. And *Zeiram* star Yuko Moriyama is so popular in her own right that a manga 'inspired' by her is on sale in Japan right now.

Any piece of animation made in the mainstream Japanese industry will, by definition, be connected to many others – there are only a finite number of people in the business. *Iria*, however, multiplied those connections by the unusual step of working in both animation and live-action, and in attracting some of anime's biggest names onto the production team. It is sometimes said that any person on the planet can be linked to any other via a string of no more than seven relationships – it would be no surprise if a show like *Iria* turned out to be similarly connected. ●



Iria is released in the USA by USMC, and in the UK by Pioneer. Moon of Tao is forthcoming in the US from Media Blasters.





Connection

ANIME CONNECTIONS

Can you link any one anime personality to another in seven steps or less? We tried linking erotic artist U-Jin to maverick director Katsuhiro Otomo: (1) U-Jin wrote *Pictures from High School*, which counted Satoshi Urushihara among the animators. (2) Satoshi Urushihara worked on *Plastic Little*, which featured Chikao Otsuka as Mikhail. (3) Chikao Otsuka played Tora in *Usho & Tora*, alongside Nozomu Sasaki as Ushio. (4) Nozomu Sasaki played Tetsuo in *Akira*, directed by Katsuhiro Otomo. Easy.

Who links *Ranma* creator Rumiko Takahashi to former Manga Entertainment boss Andy Frain? What's the quickest route from *Urotsukidoji* to *Evangelion*? How can you get from *Streetfighter the Movie* to the *Tale of Genji* in just one step? Answers on page 53.

Iria © Crowd/Bandai Visual/Mitsubishi Corporation/Banpresto

Reviews

★★★★★ LOVE IT ★★★★ BUY IT ★★★ TRY IT ★★ WATCH IT ★ FORGET IT

Reviewers' opinions are not necessarily those of the magazine. National flags denote territory of release for the item being reviewed, and not necessarily the location of the dub or original distributor. Readers are reminded that the PAL and NTSC video formats are not interchangeable in a standard VCR.

US ANIME

Birdy the Mighty

Director: Yoshiaki Kawajiri
Duration: 70 mins, dub
Certificate: unrated
Price: $24.95
Distributor: USMC, NTSC
Reviewer: Julia Sertori
Rating: ★★★

Schoolboy Tsutomu is a total failure, when luckily (?) he is killed in the crossfire between an alien criminal and an intergalactic bounty hunter. To save his life, officer Birdy merges with him, living *inside* his body, helping him through life but forcing him to transform at humorously inappropriate moments.

It sounds like an anime dream-team: the director of *Ninja Scroll*, the creator of *Patlabor*, the designer of *Tokyo Babylon* and the writer of *Armitage III*. But Masami Yuki's manga was short-lived, and this seems an idle diversion for the big names while they waited for the next real job. There are Kawajiri's trademark bounding chase scenes, impressively icky monsters from Yutaka Izubuchi and a Konaka conspiracy, but ultimately, none of the star crew work at peak efficiency.

Episode two injects healthy doses of fights, double-dealing, school angst and teenage crushes. Birdy straddles the separate sub-plots as a vengeful bounty hunter, magical girlfriend and sisterly confidante, contrasted nicely with Tsutomu's spiteful real-life sister (a great cameo from Debbie Rabbai). Only Justin Thompson founders as Tsutomu, a fine actor whose voice simply cannot maintain emotional range at the insanely high pitch he is forced to adopt.

Considering writer Konaka's background (his brother is *Ultraman* director Kazuya), and the fact that a live version would only require a bit of morphing, I wonder if this wasn't originally mooted as a live show. It bears the fingerprints of a low-budget *sentai* scribe: with aliens defeated by washing-up liquid and a hapless Earthman forced to share his body with an invisible, controlling alien. Clark Kent/Superman pastiches and a sex-swap farce straight out of *Ranma* are there for the taking. But in this limited time-frame, they don't get taken very far. ●

Legend of Crystania

Director: Ryutaro Nakamura
Duration: 85 mins, dub/sub
Certificate: (unrated)
Price: $19.98/$29.95
Distributor: ADV, NTSC
Reviewer: Fred Patten
Rating: ★★★

A live-action opening scene of teens casting dice at a fantasy role-playing game sets the mood for Ryo Mizuno's sequel to *Record of Lodoss War*. It is not, however, necessary to know the story so far. 300 years after the original anime, an island is divided by the mystic God's Wall. Humans live on one side, DaNarn (do they mean the Celtic "DaNaan"?); the gods and their followers live on the other side, Crystania. During a civil war in DaNaan, Lord Haven is murdered and his young son, Sir Redon must flee his burning home with five companions. Pausing at the God's Wall, they are suddenly pulled into Crystania by the evil god Barbas, who wants to use Redon's strong soul against the other gods. The six adventurers, whom the viewer has still not had time to get straight, are thrown into a completely new war in which the gods' warriors can transform into their respective animal avatars: lions, bears serpents and so on.

Crystania seeks to replicate the chaos of a story plotted by rolling dice. Redon and his companions have barely been introduced to each other when their town is plunged into war, then, still in shock, they are whisked into another battle in another, bewildering realm with gods and their were-beast knights. The confusion may be justified, but it still results in a cast and viewers who are jerked around by the action without being sure of what is going on. ●

Gatchaman

(Boxed Set)
Directors: Hiroyuki Fukushima and Akihiko Nishiyama
Duration: 135 mins, dub
Certificate: (unrated)
Price: $44.95
Distributor: Urban Vision
Reviewer: Fred Patten
Rating: ★★★

Science Ninja Team Gatchaman was one of anime's earliest hits, both in its Japanese television run and in its later appearance on American networks as *Battle of the Planets*. The blurb says: "...sexier, more action-packed and completely surpass the animation in the original Seventies series."

The animation, with character designs by Yasuomi Umezu and mecha by Kimitoshi Yamane) surpasses the original. But the compression of the original into only three episodes results in 135 minutes of tense drama, without any pacing for plot or character development. The Gatchaman team are five cardboard cut-out teens with superhero costumes, and the juvenile Seventies superhero action does not date well.

Would the Earth's government really entrust the defence of the planet against an overwhelming alien menace to just five untested heroes in costumes? Dozens of evil Galacter soldiers fire machine-guns at our heroes at point blank range and all miss. then the heroes massacre all the baddies in about 15 seconds with their ninja-razor boomerang/feather/yo-yo etc. Over and over and over. But the direction and design look great. ●

Tekken

Director: Kunihisa Sugishima
Duration: 60 mins, dub
Certificate: unrated (US), 15 (UK)
Price: $24.95/£12.99
Distributor: ADV, NTSC/PAL
Reviewer: Chrys Mordin
Rating: ★★★

What is it that the gamers really want to see? Is it just cool fights, or do they want an insight into the 'inner worlds' of the gaming characters? Few have managed to achieve a balance, the exception being the *Streetfighter* anime, and that benefitted from a relatively small cast and a simple story. It also managed to avoid the all-out-secret-fighting-tournament-on-secluded-island-which-doubles-as-home-for-twisted-evil-guy scenario, unlike *Tekken*, which hastily reveals a motley, disparate crew heading for the home of bad guy Heihachi Mishima.

For something claiming to be a "Motion Picture", 60 minutes seems a little short, and the film suffers for it. With a cast culled from all three games, there's a lot of motivation and exposition to get through, and for the casual viewer unacquainted with the game, there never seems enough background for you to really care just what any of these people are up to. You only get about 15 minutes until the 'secluded island' and then all hell breaks loose as the subplots collide in a frenzy of hard kicks and fierce punches. Fans of the game will get a kick out of seeing their favourite special moves, and pretty much everyone gets a look in, even down to my fave, the boxing kangaroo.

All in all, if you're a fan of the game, you'll probably get an entertaining hour. To add to the action-packed ambience, a 'rock' soundtrack has been added for your listening pleasure, with the likes of The Offspring and Corrosion of Conformity. ●

Beast City: Vampire Madonna

Director: Shinichiro Watanabe
Duration: 50 mins, dub/sub
Certificate: uncertificated
Price: $24.95/$29.95
Distributor: Anime 18, NTSC
Reviewer: Helen McCarthy
Rating: ★

I never seriously thought I would see a worse anime than *The Gigolo*, but *Vampire Madonna* makes it look like Chekhov. "Anime" is something of a misnomer as there's very little animation in evidence; apart from one scene where the heroine breaks through a window and glass flies beautifully, the animation producers seem to have spent most of the production schedule on lunch. Picking up on this mood, translator Victor Gong takes money for old rope and the actors, hiding behind aliases as original as the script (like Tuesday Knight), phone in their lines. References to *Dracula* (the heroine is called Mina) and *Vampirella* (after whose home planet Draculon the race of nympho vampire demonslayers is known) bestow none of the magic of their origins and vampire lore is used (this lot fear crosses) or discarded (they take showers) with no regard for consistency, credibility or story progression. Naomi *(Melancholy Slave)* Hayakawa's vampiric trio get their daily bread by having oral sex with a sleeping human and sinking their cute little pointy teeth in his engorged penis, all without waking him up. Before I saw *Vampire Madonna* I wouldn't have believed that was possible. Now I think complete unconsciousness during any part of the proceedings is a merciful release. ●

Twin Angels #3

Director: Kan Fukumoto
Duration: 60 mins, dub
Certificate: unrated
Price: $24.95
Distributor: Anime 18, NTSC
Reviewer: Julia Sertori
Rating: ★★★

"Commence creation of an evil sex barrier!" Sorcerer-nuns Ai and Mai must defend their charge Lord Onimaro (who is 21, allegedly) from another demon assault, when Kama and Sutra, the King and Queen of Seduction, cart him off to a ritual orgy. In other words, it's business as usual for Oji *(Sex Jihad)* Miyako, the only person who could write an anime which featured two miniskirted girls on a school roof during a storm, trying to hang onto a magic staff while lightning transforms it into a giant penis.

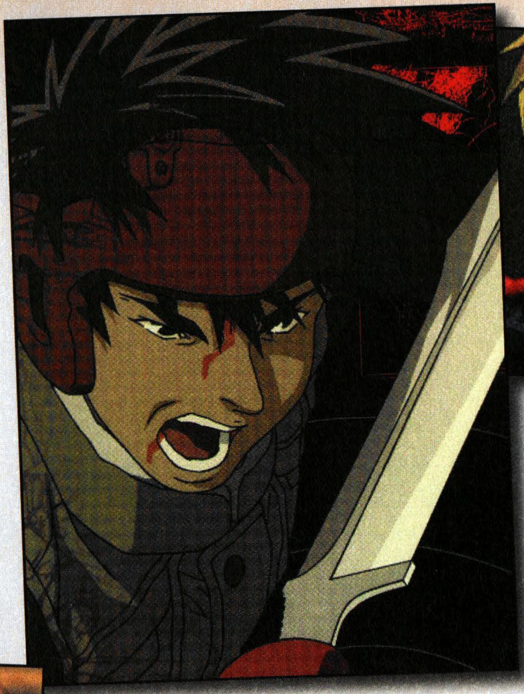
Like many "teen anime", this is risible spooge for skirt-lifting boys, convinced that their own pubertal trauma is the be-all and end-all of human existence. But unlike most of its fellows, it knows how silly it is and encourages us to laugh along with it. With a boy guarded in a temple by a gaggle of gorgeous women, I'm surprised they didn't try calling this *Tenchi Screwyo*. Like *La Blue Girl* before it, *Twin Angels* takes a sexy slice of *Devil Hunter Yoko*, and piles on exuberant dialogue from a cast that, for once, seems to be enjoying themselves as much as I was.

Faced with wheat-licking, sibling snogs and belly-dancing without pants, my Immortal Dialogue Sampler ruptured classic quotes all over this review.

Take advantage of the lustful mood of our time and check out the anime that beer and curry were invented for. *My petals are already fresh and quivering with excitement* for the next episode. *You may be saying no now, but soon you'll be begging for it. Everybody pant hard.* ●

Spriggan

Director: Hirotsugu Kawasaki
Duration: 90 mins, sub
Certificate: n/a
Price: n/a
Distributor: n/a, seen at London Film Festival
Reviewer: Julia Sertori
Rating: ★★★



With the Pentagon fighting a secret society for control of Noah's Ark, *Spriggan* has all the hallmarks of a classic sci-fi anime. In a succession of bloody battles, punctuated with Biblical apocalypse and government conspiracy, director Hirotsugu Kawasaki recalls the whip-like cuts of *Ghost in the Shell*, tearing from shot to shot to distract us from the sparse animation – *Spriggan* has less than a third of *Akira*'s cel count. With a breakneck pace worthy of Tsui Hark, the film compresses the story into a kinetic 90 minutes, thumbing its nose at viewers who have not revised by reading the comic first.

"Superviser" Katsuhiro Otomo's influence is clearest in the design of the Ark and the portrayal of the evil McDougall. Like the mutant children of *Akira*, he has a bluish pallor, a vocabulary that belies his age and a voice provided by a genuine child actor. The young Ryuji Aigase is chilling in the role, stumbling only when he is called upon to laugh maniacally.

From the English lettering to the Chinese theme song, this is an anime made with the foreign audience in mind. With animation by studios in Seoul and Beijing, *Spriggan* also boasts homages to Western films, including *Raiders of the Lost Ark* and the Turkish travelogue of *From Russia With Love*. The anti-Americanism of the original, dropped from the comic translation, has been restored – perhaps a post-*X-Files* willingness to cast the Pentagon as the bad guy.

The project began life as a video of *Spriggan*'s "Berserker" chapters, and while a lot of money has been spent, close-up it still looks like an OAV inflated with extra capital. *Spriggan* is an incredible video anime, rivalling *Ninja Scroll* in its action, but sits uneasily on the big screen beside *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell*. The film is a roller-coaster ride, but the two-dimensional characters distinguish it as an adaptation of genre hokum way below *Akira*'s standard. From the gruff hero and his wiseacre buddy, through to Professor Exposition and his bespectacled assistant, *Spriggan* retains much of the formula that won the manga a loyal following of teenage boys in search of adventure. This film will keep a lot of old fans happy, but is unlikely to bring in many new ones. ●

Bullet Ballet

Director: Shinya Tsukamoto
Duration: 90 mins, sub
Certificate: n/a
Price: n/a
Distributor: n/a, seen at London Film Festival
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★★★

Goda (Tsukamoto) is mugged by gang members as he attempts to strike up a relationship with Chisato (Kirina Mano from Sogo Ishii's *Labyrinth of Dreams*), a young girl given to leaning dangerously backwards off platforms before passing tube trains. At once quintessentially Tsukamoto and strikingly different. Japan's maverick hyphenate has jettisoned neither violent imagery nor power to shock. Gone are the machine mutations of the *Tetsuo* films and the extreme body piercing of *Tokyo Fist*, replaced by Goda's growing relationship with a home-made gun not unlike *Videodrome* without the body horror effects. Leaving aside the finale's appearance of Kurosawa regular Hisashi Igawa as a traditional Yakuza, its youthful gang members are closer to the unruly teens of *Rebel Without a Cause* or *West Side Story* – the two generations between which Goda is trapped. Shot in delirious black and white, stripped down to the barest of essentials and compressed in parts to incredible speed, this is Tsukamoto's most original film since his first, and may indeed, when the dust has settled, prove to be his best to date. ●

After Life

Director: Hirokazu Kore'eda
Duration: 118 mins, sub
Price: n/a
Certificate: n/a
Distributor: n/a (seen at London Film Festival)
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★★

The newly-dead stumble out of the fog into a boarding house run by social worker types. Here they must choose their most cherished memory which (as put on film for each person by the institution's staff) will be all they remember when they move on. For some, this is relatively easy – the old lady who appears already to be reliving her childhood, the schoolgirl who must be dissuaded from a commonly-chosen Disneyland ride. For others, it's a near impossible task. One man refuses to choose. Another struggles to find some special moment in his mundane life; as he does so, a curious bond develops between him and the youth assigned to help. Given its success in tackling the wholly engrossing and thought-provoking premise on all levels, this Japanese feature deserves much wider distribution than the director's previous bereavement drama *Maboroshi*. ●

Neon Genesis Evangelion 12

Director: Hideaki Anno
Duration: 50 mins, dub
Certificate: 12
Price: £12.99
Distributor: AD Vision, PAL
Reviewer: Jim Swallow
Rating: ★★★

And so begins the final movement in Anno's symphony of angst, as the revelations and dark truths come thick and fast. As ever, the blink-and-you'll-miss-'em asides are spat out in scatter-gun style around the edges of the bigger set pieces, and every one of them is important. It's doubly annoying, then, that AD Vision's English-language cast are often garbled, indistinct or drowned out by a bodged sound mix (at least on my review copy). In episode 23, while Asuka fails and feasts on the ashes of her depression, Rei confronts the 16th Angel with terrible consequences, and we finally discover her true nature. For those of you who've been paying attention, it's just what you thought it was, only more so. Things fall apart as Ritsuko breaks down and the Seele council's endgame begins. The arrival of the Fifth Child raises some uncomfortable questions about the origins of the Angels. Almost entirely played out over the music to *Ode to Joy*, episode 24 elegantly sets up the pattern of dominoes for the series finale, and starts them falling. It's not the end of the world, but you can see it from here. ●

Motel Cactus

Director: Park Ki-Yong
Duration: 91 mins, sub
Price: n/a
Certificate: n/a
Distributor: n/a (seen at London Film Festival)
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★

This South Korean outing commences with a series of dizzyingly lengthy takes in which a couple pull each other's clothes off for frenzied bouts of lovemaking. They're in room 407 in the eponymous Seoul "love hotel" – in which a series of couples enact various stages of a relationship. Two students making a movie on video start to bond when their cameraman fails to show up, a woman from a funeral party reveals her pregnancy to a former lover, and a drunken couple cover the room with reams of toilet paper. But apart from an all-too brief moment of back-stroking intimacy by the funeral couple, nothing ever quite matches the promise of the opening sequence. The material quickly becomes a bore, as demonstrated by the high audience attrition rate at the screening I attended. Chris Doyle's cinematography is consistently impressive (especially numerous blurry compositions behind glass covered with pin-sharp droplets of rain) but he's done much better work elsewhere and his contribution alone doesn't merit the wider release his name might encourage. ●

Ikinai

Director: Hiroshi Shimizu
Duration: 101 mins, sub
Certificate: n/a
Price: n/a
Distributor: n/a, seen at London Film Festival
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★★★

Imagine the unthinkable: *Sonatine* without gangsters. But that's what's on offer in this first Office Kitano production directed by former assistant Shimizu. A group of men, sunk in unpayable debts, charter a bus as the Okinawa Sunshine Club with the intention of driving too fast round a notorious mountain road bend to cause a fatal accident. But they haven't bargained on one of them being committed to an asylum two days before departure and his place being snapped up by his 20 year old niece, an enthusiastic innocent completely ignorant of the plan.

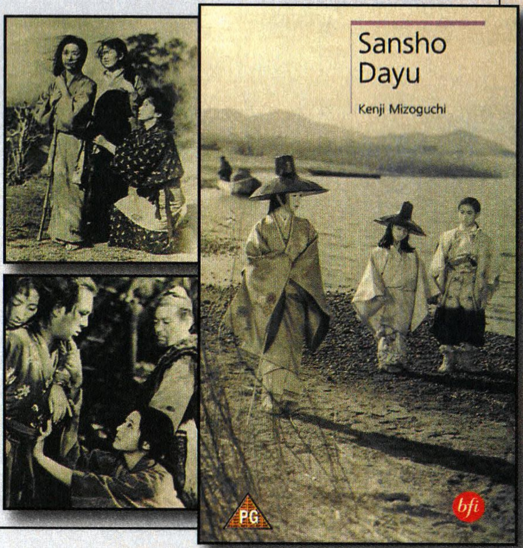
The visual style recalls *Sonatine* – a largely locked-off long-shot camera, the occasional beach location and comparable pre-death rituals. The waiting-for-death theme begs further comparison, but Shimizu is very much his own man and imbues the whole with a strong sense of irony. There are even kabuki-esque eruptions to the generally (and disturbingly) subdued proceedings – arguments over casual remarks when the girl is present, an error of judgement in a strip joint, and an unexpected accident involving a hapless motorist. Fascinating for many of the same reasons as *Sonatine*, this deserves a wider release. ●

Sansho Dayu

Director: Kenji Mizoguchi
Duration: 120 mins, sub, b&w
Price: £15.99
Certificate: PG
Distributor: BFI, PAL
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★★★

This extraordinary 1954 film, based on Mori Ogai's novel, is set in 11th century Japan. A family patriarch's ideals involve him in a clash with peasant-bashing military types. His wife flees with their children, but they're captured by slavers. Separated from mother, the children are sold to the eponymous Sansho, a cheerless tyrant given to punishing escape attempts with a red-hot poker.

This is one of those timeless dramas which resonates with enduring mythic power. The moral code of the scarcely-seen father ("without mercy, men are no more than beasts") presides over all, while Kinuyo Tanaka's portrayal of the mother is remarkable. A masterpiece, and readers may like to know that there was an anime version in 1961, directed by Taiji *(White Serpent)* Yabushita and Yugo *(Cleopatra)* Serikawa. ●



Ugetsu Monogatari

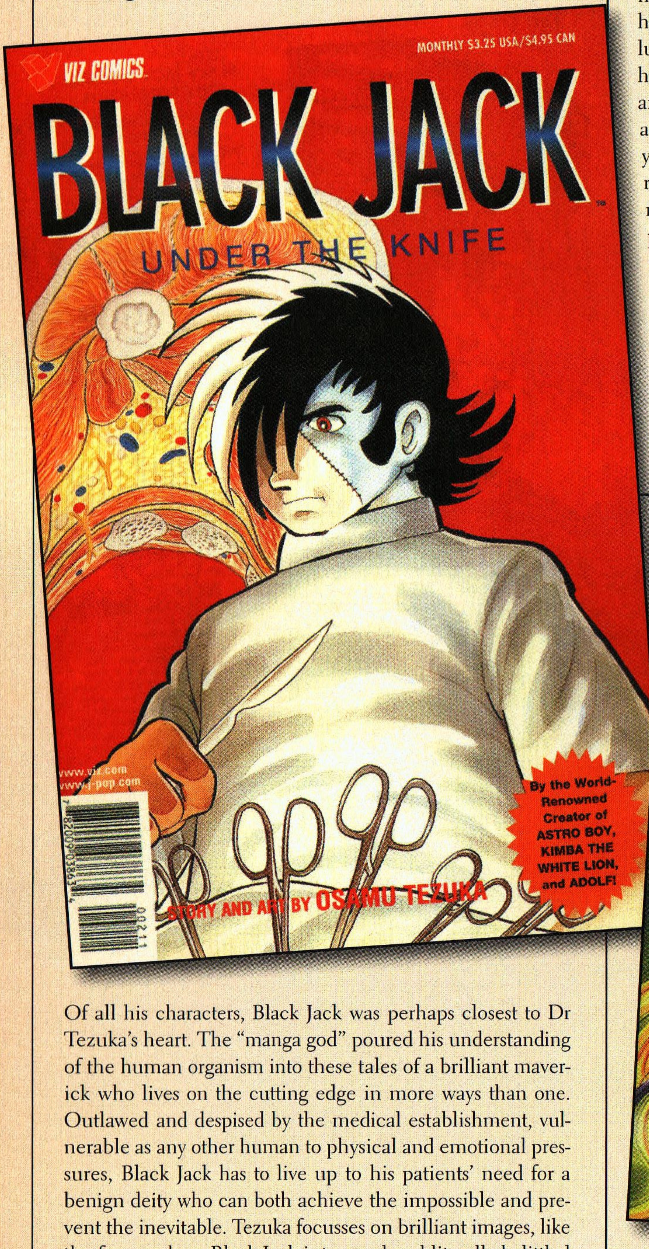
Director: Kenji Mizoguchi
Duration: 92 mins, sub, b&w
Price: £15.99
Certificate: PG
Distributor: BFI, PAL
Reviewer: Jeremy Clarke
Rating: ★★★★

An alleged inspiration for *Princess Mononoke*, this 1953 adaptation of Akinari Ueda's samurai ghost tales sees a potter lured into nocturnal nuptuals with a beautiful, sex-starved, lady spirit. There's a parallel story in which the potter's none-too-bright assistant realises his ambition of becoming a samurai, a station to which he's patently unsuited.

Constant to-ing and fro-ing effectively reduces the last hour to a series of brief vignettes which, though impressive, lack *Sansho Dayu*'s unflinching sense of purpose. Nonetheless, the proceedings have bags of unearthly atmosphere and are intermittently punctuated by (masterfully understated) rapes, seductions and killings. One especially effective moment has the potter's wife (with infant riding on her back) speared by starving battle-weary samurai almost as an afterthought following their theft of her meagre food supply. Buy and be astounded. ●

Black Jack: Under The Knife Operations One & Two

Viz Communications, $3.25
Writer/Artist: Osamu Tezuka
Reviewer: Helen McCarthy
Rating: ★★★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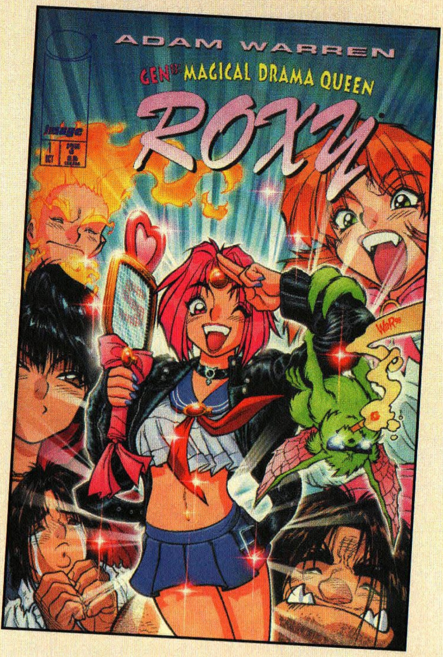
STORY AND ART BY OSAMU TEZUKA

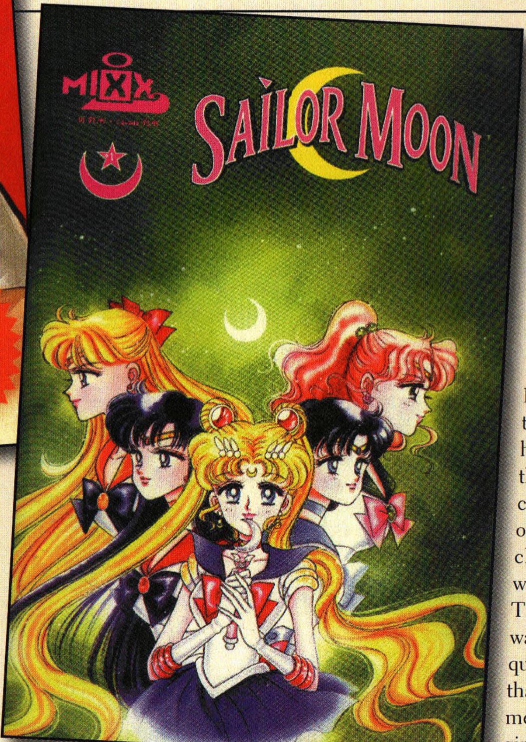
Of all his characters, Black Jack was perhaps closest to Dr Tezuka's heart. The "manga god" poured his understanding of the human organism into these tales of a brilliant maverick who lives on the cutting edge in more ways than one. Outlawed and despised by the medical establishment, vulnerable as any other human to physical and emotional pressures, Black Jack has to live up to his patients' need for a benign deity who can both achieve the impossible and prevent the inevitable. Tezuka focusses on brilliant images, like the frame where Black Jack is trapped and literally belittled by the received wisdom of the medical texts which stand between him and his patient's need. The stories develop at a pace many mainstream comic readers will find slow, but the central issue of the demands we make of medicine and the limits of humanity is as vital today as ever. ●

Gen 13: Magical Drama Queen Roxy

Image Comics, $3.50/£2.65 each (3 issues)
Writer/Artist: Adam Warren
Reviewer: Chrys Mordin
Rating: ★★★★



An increasing number of American comic artists are incorporating manga/anime influences into their work, but no-one does it better than Adam Warren. Known in fan circles for his hilarious reworking of *The Dirty Pair*, and action-packed *Bubblegum Crisis* mini series, Warren turns his hand to superheroes with this latest release. Anyone lucky enough to catch *Grunge: The Movie*, his last *Gen 13* miniseries, was treated to an affectionate reworking of Hong Kong action themes, using Image Comic's young and harassed super teens. Warren returns to explore the Cinderella myth, mixed liberally with a poke at the very peculiar conventions of the Magical Girl anime genre. *Sailor Moon*, *Tenchi* and a zillion other series have used the concept of a young girl, gifted with a magical talisman, usually a furry mascot of some kind, a suitably ludicrous battle cry, and a soft-focus love interest, but none with the tongue quite as firmly in the cheek as Adam Warren. Transformed into a magical princess, Roxy (the slacker smoker of the superhero set) must search for true love, whilst battling an evil babe and her witless minions – a tired storyline invigorated by Warren's sure hand. Glorious art, tucked full of in-jokes and homages, the usual wit and pop culture context-laden writing we expect from Adam Warren by now, and you can't go wrong with this entertaining (and educational!) miniseries. Highly recommended, wet-your-pants funny and darn cute. ●



Sailor Moon # 1

Mixx Entertainment, $2.95
Writer/Artist: Naoko Takeuchi
Reviewer: Helen McCarthy
Rating: ★★★

If Mixx Entertainment can get this to its intended audience they'll have a hit on their hands. To do that, they'll have to look outside the comic stores; *Sailor Moon* belongs on the rack at the supermarket checkout alongside the sweets, where ten-year-old girls can find it. This isn't to belittle Takeuchi's warm, sweet and involving story - quite the reverse; it deserves better than some comic store ghetto. It gives me more hope of persuading young girls to read comics than anything I've seen for ages. The art is as pretty and fluttery as a pink ribbon, the storyline breathless and headlong as the heroine's thoughts, but at its core is a heart of emotion and power, only hinted at so far in the dashing Tuxedo Mask's question "Who are you really?" Stu Levy's translation is light and delicate and the inclusion of a couple of letters from the author to her readers is a nice touch. Bunny's dangerous, difficult quest for herself will appeal to the open-hearted of all ages. ●

Legend of the Overfiend nos. 1-3

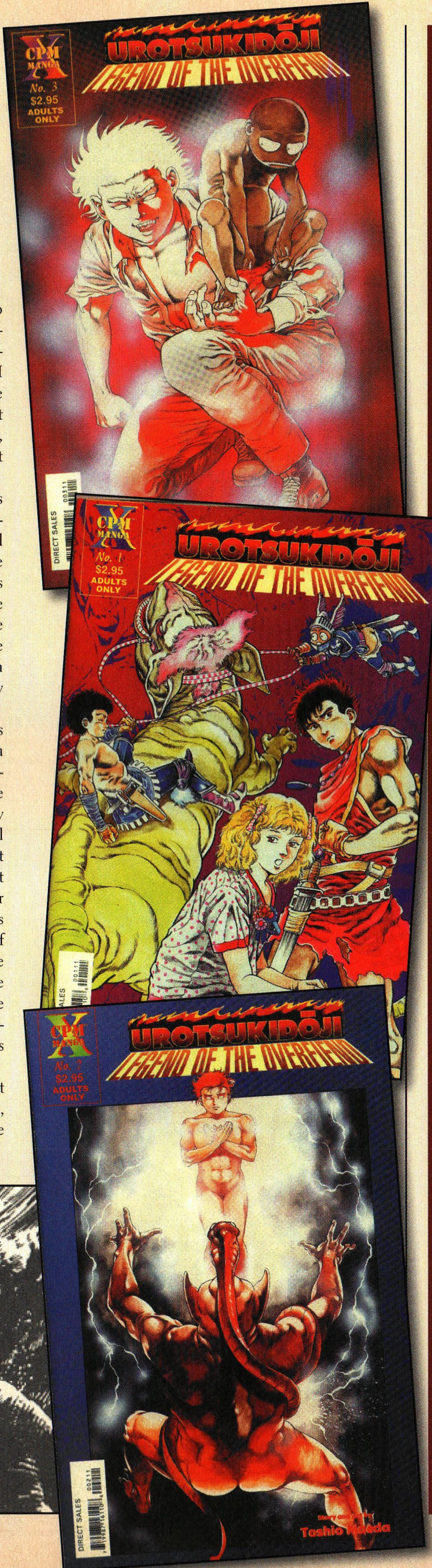
CPM Manga X
$2.95/£2.95 each
Writer/Artist: Toshio Maeda
Reviewer: Helen McCarthy
Rating: ★★

The comic of the video that did the most to change the mass perception of Japanese animation might be expected to be a major moneyspinner, but looking at the first three issues I wonder if CPM have misjudged the market. The style is nothing like the anime, and, spun out over three years of short monthly episodes, Maeda's urban myth may lose much of its impact and its audience.

The adaptation has its problems; it seems reproduced from a printed source, and the graphics, overworked in the first place, fill in and coarsen badly. This is especially evident on those exterior scenes which seem to have originated as photocopies. The Western retouch is a worse atrocity than anything in the story. "The Backroom Boyz" responsible for drawing in the genitals left out of the original have no more than a nodding acquaintance with human anatomy and even less with Maeda's own art style.

Maeda's art is far uglier than the anime; its grotesque and cheaply-dressed characters are a reflection of daily life as kids see themselves living it. The teacher dresses in a lumpy chainstore pinafore, lust object Akemi's substantial flowery knickers stretch over an equally substantial rump, and even demon-kid Amanojaku is short and greasy-looking. Yet elements of Maeda's art are almost playful. The first issue uses the cover for the second Japanese collected volume, its crazy monster, cod-classical references and air of jollity redolent of Toriyama's *Dragonball*. The interior art recalls the Fifties, its monsters the foam-and-tubing confections that usually oppose Ultraman or the Power Rangers rather than anything from the Spielberg movies its characters invoke.

But only students of graphic style will get anything more from the comic than the anime, and they'll get more from – and pay less for – the Japanese originals than the Western version. ●



In BRIEF

by Melissa Hyland

Oh My Goddess! 'The Devil In Miss Urd' #4 (of 6)

by Kosuke Fujishima, Dark Horse
Rating: ★★★★
Urd's evil clone has been found, but no-one can tell the two apart, and 'bad' Urd must be unmasked before she destroys the world. Nail-biting, yet hilariously funny, with terrific art.

Shadow Lady I - Dangerous Love #5 (of 7)

by Masakazu Katsura, Dark Horse
Rating: ★★★★
Aimi has finally won detective Bright's affections, but unfortunately they're directed at her criminal alter-ego, Shadow Lady. A wonderful Magical Girl parody, that just keeps getting sillier.

Drakuun: The Hidden War #5

by Johji Manabe, Dark Horse
Rating: ★★★
As Karula tries to organise the Grand Alliance against the evil Kurgh, she makes a shocking discovery that could drastically affect her chances in battle. An episode of revelations, that hint at interesting developments later in the story.

Blade of the Immortal #30

by Hiroaki Samura, Dark Horse
Rating: ★★★
Magatsu reaches Anotsu's sword school of murderous outcasts, but is startled to find an upper-caste official from the Shogunate amongst their ranks. This episode isn't quite as engaging as those previously and the art style is an acquired taste.

Gunsmith Cats: Bean Bandit #2 (of 9)

by Kenichi Sonoda, Dark Horse
Rating: ★★★★
Rally has a score to settle with courier Bean, and plans to stop his latest drug delivery. Breaking into his place is easy, but then he arrives home earlier than expected... One of Sonoda's funnier episodes, but the detail in his cars, guns and Chicago streets is still stunning.

MISCELLANEOUS

Bubblegum Crisis EX

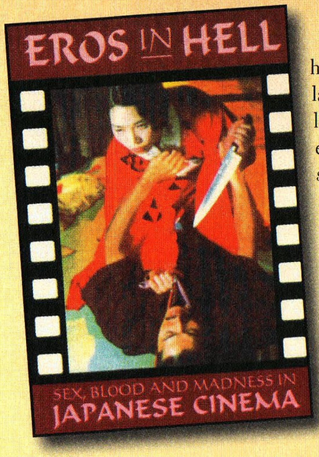
Format: Roleplaying game supplement, 96pp softcover book
Price: £12.99
Publisher: R.Talsorian Games
Reviewer: Jim Swallow
Rating: ★★★

BUBBLEGUM CRISIS EX
THE EXTREME ANIME ROLEPLAYING EXPANSION

The most recent supplement for RTG's *Bubblegum Crisis* roleplaying game, *EX* is a grab-bag selection of material from all across the series, drawn from a large collection of might-have-beens and cutting-room floor discards that never made it to the small screen adventures of the Knight Sabers. To be sure, *EX* is the thinnest of the *BGC RPG*'s books in terms of size and content, but it's unfair to label this supplement as nothing more than reheated left-overs. The RTG team, along with a legion of hard core *BGC* fans, have combed through the mountains of design material and model sheets from *Bubblegum Crisis*, *Bubblegum Crash* and *AD Police* in search of lost material to inject into a campaign. Spin-off manga, drama discs and computer games have been plundered for cool and nifty tech, with the result that over half of the supplement is packed to the gills with hardware and stats for hardsuits, weapons, vehicles, Boomers and more besides. The rest contains a complete adventure, and some chunky rules chapters – these include a hardsuit design system, essays on Boomers as player characters and notes on alternate environments for campaigns. However, the pages featuring revised character stats for the entire *BGC* cast and the thinly-covered cities chapter feel like padding and are easily missable. Good stuff with few reservations; here's looking forward to the *Bubblegum Crisis: Tokyo 2040* supplement. ●

Eros in Hell: Sex Blood and Madness in Japanese Cinema

Creation Books, £14.95
Authors: Jack Hunter et al.
Reviewer: Jim McLennan
Rating: ★★★

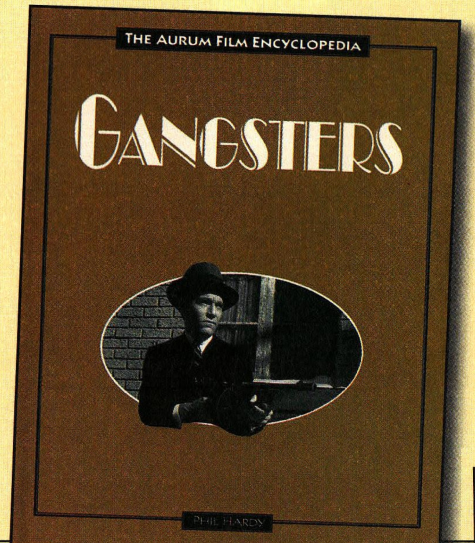


Live-action Japanese cinema is even less well-known than anime; if it's not Kurosawa or Kitano, you can forget it. This book provides a glimpse of the uncharted areas, but concentrates on the more extreme side of 'pink films', porno and sado-splatter. And believe me, I mean extreme – sometimes, you may be thankful the profuse illustrations are in black and white.

A lot of space is given to detailed descriptions, but this is forgiveable, since few are likely to be seen here. Anime is largely ignored, limited to a few references to *Urotsukidoji* and its ilk, and the format is annoying, with multi-page footnotes interrupting the flow. While not as groundbreaking as the authors think, there is still much of interest. The interviews are particularly fresh; the one with Takao Nakano, director of the *Exorsister* series of live-action "tentacle" films, includes incisive insights into *Evangelion* (though the interviewers do not seem to know what it is). It's a glimpse into an abyss which many would rather ignore, and as such, is fascinating reading. Just not one for public transport... ●

The Aurum Encyclopaedia of Gangster Movies

Aurum (US: Overlook), £35
Editor: Phil Hardy
Reviewer: Jim McLennan
Rating: ★★



The gangster genre is not generally a topic of interest in this magazine except that, in contrast to earlier volumes, Japanese animation is now mentioned at least in passing. The format emphasises breadth rather than depth, a few hundred words describe and comment on each title, with obscure films getting virtually the same space as the well-known and influential. For English-language movies, it's impressively comprehensive, though one wonders about its boundaries: *Die Hard* is included, but not the Bond movies.

Outside Hollywood, the book is patchy; what's included is less notable than what's missing. While acknowledging the impact of John Woo and Ringo Lam, many superb Hong Kong Triad films are omitted. It seems titles are limited to those available in the West, though Juzo Itami's classic *Minbo no Onna* is also absent despite several television screenings. Hence there is no entry for the animated *City Hunter*, even though it receives a mention in the entry on Jackie Chan's live-action version. Videos like *Riding Bean* are not separated from films like *Golgo 13*, though to its credit, animation isn't treated as anything "different" – the entries are judged on merit, not on medium.

If you like gangster movies, there's plenty of meat here; but if you are only tangentially interested, the pickings are perhaps too irritatingly lean to justify the cordon-bleu price. ●

Perfect Blue

Masahiro Ikumi, iNoks, PCCR-95001, £25 (import)
Reviewer: Cathy Sterling
Rating: ★★★

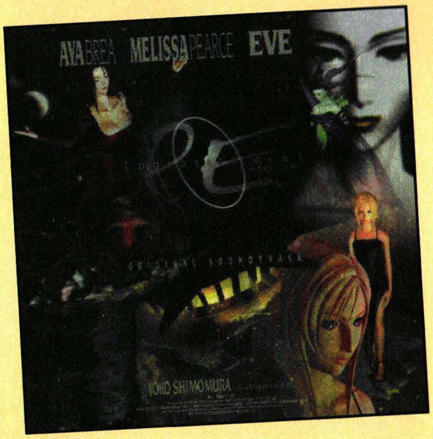
In keeping with a film that owes so much to *Suspiria*, much of the CD is a pastiche of the electro-classical horror typified by Argento and his slasher-flick cohorts. "Mima's Theme" features a lonely, random piano amid a vortex of threatening synths, while "Bad Dream" could almost be lifted from the background noise in *Doom*. The deliberately cheesy songs by the Cham pop group are one the scariest things about the whole album; they're so perky it hurts. "Angel of Love" had me gritting my teeth already, but "OK to be Alone" was pain incarnate. Great on screen, but less entertaining on your stereo. ●

PERFECT BLUE
ORIGINAL SOUND TRACK

Parasite Eve Original Soundtrack

Yoko Shimomura, Squaresoft/Digicube, SSCX-10020,
c. £30 (import)
Reviewer: Chrys Mordin
Rating: ★★★

Squaresoft's games have a proud tradition when it comes to providing atmospheric and effective music, and *Parasite Eve* is no exception – in fact, it's one of the most accomplished contributions to gameplay, yet. However, as a stand-alone musical offering, it does have some problems. The entire game soundtrack is included in the two disc set, and that leads to a strange mixture of tracks, and a number of repetitive themes cropping up with disturbing regularity. Although skilfully blended into a whole, some tracks drag the pacing down. When it works – as in "Primal Eyes", a driving techno-influenced track, or some of the finer opera sequences, such as "Sotto Voce" – it provides a creepy, atmospheric listening experience, but when it doesn't, you find yourself reaching for the controls to move it on. Altogether, the soundtrack would have been more effective if sold in a condensed version, with the pick of the tracks mixed together on one disc. But don't let that discourage you – *Parasite Eve* was one of the gaming experiences of 1998, and the soundtrack is a fine contribution to this growing genre. ●



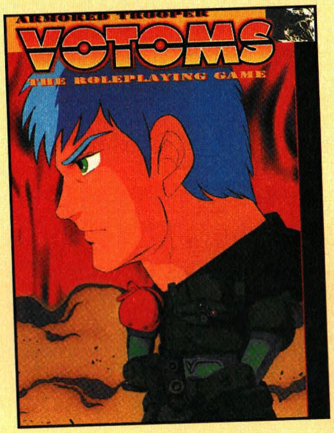
Japanese Cinema Encyclopedia: The Sex Films

Vital Books, $28 (c.£20)
Authors: Thomas and Yuko Weisser
Reviewer: Jonathan Clements
Rating: ★★★★

Despite an overtly unappealing subject (live-action Japanese erotica since 1963) and the occasional need for an editorial spanking, the Weissers pack an incredible amount of data into 637 pages. Not all of it is about the contentious world of Japanese sex movies. I now know that Seijun Suzuki was sacked after making *Branded to Kill*, and Naoto Takenaka (the weird mambo-man in *Shall We Dance*) made a name for himself playing mystery-author Edogawa Rampo. Nuggets like these are lost pieces of the Japanese cinefile jigsaw; ironic that mainstream sources haven't mentioned them.

For the anime fan, there are entries for the live *Kekko Kamen*, *Sukeban Deka*, *Weather Report Girl*, Kazuo Koike's *Goyokiba* series and the infamous *Rapeman* films. The live action *La Blue Girl* isn't here, but presumably the authors have filed it under Horror. I would have liked a larger discussion of the hidden laws of live-action Japanese erotica, since some, like "rape is a validation of beauty", deserved entire chapters to themselves. Less distasteful, but just as intriguing, would have been a list of the 184 words deemed inappropriate for use in film titles. Although I doubt very much that I shall ever have the chance to see *Seiko's Juicy Thighs*, *Naked Rashomon*, *Virgin Sniper* or *That's Hentaitainment*, at least I know they exist. And before you ask, yes, there are pictures. A valuable resource on Japanese film in general, not just the naughty ones. ●

Armored Trooper Votoms: The Roleplaying Game



Format: Roleplaying game, 176pp softcover book
Price: £17.99
Publisher: R.Talsorian Games
Reviewer: Jim Swallow
Rating: ★★★

This grim little number performs a double service as a competent roleplaying game and an extremely concise guide to the *VOTOMS* anime series. The exhaustive book even contains a complete episode guide. In fact, you can almost be forgiven for forgetting this is an RPG, as it's only the last 50-odd pages that feature the rules system. *VOTOMS* operates under the hybrid Fuzion rules system, and while it's not without its problems, it's nicely malleable in the hands of an experienced group of gamers.

For those of you unfamiliar with the *VOTOMS* universe, it's a brutal, bleak world of war, conspiracy and betrayal. In the mould of classic westerns, it's the kind of place where haunted gunslinger drifters wander into town only to mix it up with the corrupt locals, except here the men with no names pilot Vertical One-man Tanks for Offence and Manoeuvre instead of carrying six-guns. The gameworld is grim and gritty and from first impressions it appears limited as a campaign basis – but the writers provide some solid leads for play direction, and it's only a shame that an introductory scenario couldn't have been packed in as well – as it is, the rules pages have their text's point size dropped down to squint level. Mecha fan gamers will also find it interesting to compare *VOTOMS* with the *Heavy Gear* universe, to see how much the latter is based on the former anime. Overall, an excellent resource and an above-average RPG. ●

Song to Fly

Yoko Kanno, Victor, VICL-60159, £18 (import)
Reviewer: Jonathan Clements
Rating: ★★★★

Yoko Kanno will try *anything*, from bagpipes to sitars, Bulgarian choirs to big-band swing. But whatever she does, she does it better than anyone else. The darling of the anime scene, *Song to Fly* is her first chance to record an album without an anime to hang it on, although several of the tracks have already been used in the computer game *Earth Winds*.

"Atomic Bird" is a return to some of Kanno's haunting alien music from *Macross Plus*, combined with her devotional experiments from *Escaflowné*. But there are indications of yet more directions for this incredible composer. Long-time collaborator Gabriela Robin sings Kanno's "ABC Mouse Parade", which calls to mind Jack Nicholson, on helium, leading a marching band. "The Ship" could be from a from a film soundtrack as yet unmade, and the Joe Boxerish "Nowhere and Everywhere" is part Beatles-pastiche, part AOR hit. Who knows if Kanno's next step will be another anime, a musical, an opera or the *Billboard* charts? Knowing her prolific, prodigious talent, it might even be all four. ●

Letters

We regret that we cannot reply personally to any correspondence or return any unsoliticed items sent to the magazine.

Owing once again to the anomalies of magazine publishing, issue one has yet to be published as I write. But there are still a few queries drifting in from MM46, and a surprisingly large number of people who can't read the subscription details on the contents page. Most of the correspondence we've received in the last few days, however, has been about the London premiere of *Spriggan*.

HIROTSUGU WHO?

I was very pleased to see *Spriggan* shown at the London Film Festival, but I was expecting a Katsuhiro Otomo film. My friends told me that Otomo was the director, but the opening credits definitely say Hirotsugu Kawasaki. Who is Kawasaki, and what has Otomo been up to?

Jason Weather, Balham, London

Hirotsugu Kawasaki was born in 1958. After graduating from Tokyo University of the Arts (Geidai), he began working for OH Productions in 1981. Since 1990 he has been freelance. He worked as a conceptual artist and character designer on *Laputa* (1986), *Akira* (1988), *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) and *Memories* (1995). *Spriggan*, however, was his first film as director. Otomo's getting quite a reputation as a fixer and kingmaker in the anime business. On *Perfect Blue*, he made sure the right introductions were made to set novelist Takeuchi up with the right director and scenarist. He's lending his name to the forthcoming *Metropolis*, and also directed a 10-minute *Gundam* short (shown at the Big Bang announcement) by the name of *Mission to the Rise*. As for *Spriggan*, there's quite a bit of who did what in this issue's review.

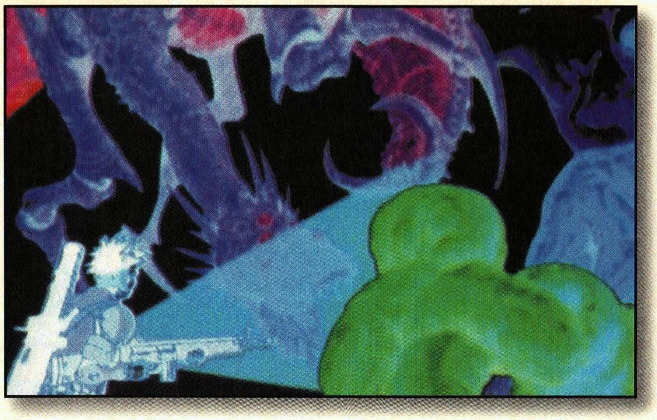
We love getting your letters, and read them all, even if there isn't enough room to put them all in the magazine. Send your letters to Manga Max, Titan Magazines, 42-44 Dolben Street, London SE1 0UP, UK or titanbooks@compuserve.com. Full addresses will not be printed unless correspondents specifically request it. We reserve the right to edit letters for space, consistency and editorial caprice.

FAIRY DUST-UP

Is it true that *Spriggan* means "fairy gun"?

Kathy Hecht, Gloucester

Er... well, sort of. According to the *Spriggan* movie book, it's supposed to come "...from the fairy creatures of English folklore, who guarded a great treasure beneath a giant stone. Normally of tiny stature, they could grow to giant size if threatened by an enemy." And we all knew that, didn't we?



DISC WORLD

Why do you bother reviewing loads of Japanese CDs in your review pages? It's not like I can go out to my local high street and buy them. You could always use the space you save to give more information about the videos you receive.

Patrick Sturnan, Cambridge

Except of course that you *can* obtain the Japanese CDs we review in this country. That's why we include the serial numbers, since some record shops will happily order them. If you don't have any luck in your neighbourhood, try ringing Otaku on 0181 699 2199 with the serial number (and a credit card) at the ready.

WHERE'S THE BEEF-CAKE?

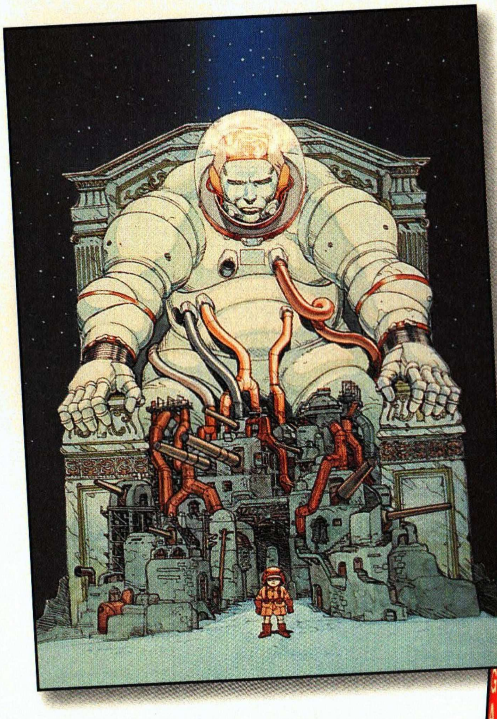
I heard that *Manga Max* won't have any manga in it. Is this true?

Robert Stover, via e-mail

You and a zillion other people. For US readers wondering what all the fuss is about, *Manga Mania*, this magazine's previous incarnation, used to reprint Dark Horse manga on some of its pages.

There are a few things that I and my predecessor would like to make clear. The decisions (a) to promise to run a new manga and (b) to go back on that promise, were both taken *after* Helen left her job and *before* I took over. Nobody at Titan has owned up to making that guarantee in the final issue of *Manga Mania*. I was told when I took over the magazine that there would be no manga in it, for reasons I covered in my first editorial. I have made no secret of this and told everyone who has asked me of the situation. No *Manga Max* advert has claimed to be for a magazine containing Japanese comics, old or new. Titan even took the rather expensive decision on issue one in the UK to include the erotic supplement as a sealed section rather than bagging the whole issue, since that would give potential buyers the chance to leaf through the magazine.

The magazine you are reading is very different from the black-and-white creation that was first published way back in 1993. I was hired to edit a magazine fitting these specifications, not any other ones. As I said in my first editorial, there are plenty of other places you can buy manga.



Clockwise from above: Memories of manga; The good old days in MM7; *Spriggan*'s Jean Jacquemonde and Yu Ominae; *Spriggan*'s star does his impression of Jonathan Clements trying to stop the press; more Jurassic larks in Spriggan.

LOOK *back in* MANGA

Five years ago in the January 1994 *Manga Mania*, the UK scene was whipped up into a hype frenzy by the news that Crusader Video would be "putting the needs of the UK consumer first." Boss James O'Shea announced his intention to buck the trend in the anime business of nothing but "exploding demon rapes and robotic death machines." Manga Video announced the month-by-month release of the *Guyver* series, while in the US Viz released volume one of the *Sanctuary* manga and *Battle of the Ultra Brothers*. Japanese anime releases included *Orguss 02* and *Jojo's Bizarre Adventures*. Timeless quote of the month from the letters page: "I'd really appreciate your advice as to how I can become a professional manga/ anime artist, because I'm a very determined hard worker... Do you know of anyone who's willing to take on an apprentice in the manga/anime field?" Then, as now, the answer is no. Sorry.

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QUIZ ANSWERS

TEKKEN:

Trick question - they're all in there.

IRIA CONNECTION:

Several of the anime adaptations of Rumiko Takahashi's *Urusei Yatsura* were directed by Mamoru Oshii, who also helmed *Ghost in the Shell*. Andy Frain was one of the producers. *Overfiend* creator Toshio Maeda also came up with *Adventure Kid*. *Adventure Kid* screenwriter Akio Satsugawa also penned episodes of *Evangelion*. *Streetfighter* director Gisaburo Sugii, sometimes known as the anime world's Stanley Kubrick for his constant switching of genres, was also responsible for the *Tale of Genji* anime.

LAST WORD

Frederik L. Schodt on

The *Lolita* Complex

Over the years, I've often had to defend manga and anime against critics who think they are too erotic or too violent. They do have a lot of sex and violence in them, I always say, but so too do live action films and novels. Many people persist in finding anime and manga disturbing precisely because they persist in thinking of "comics" and "cartoons" as entertainment for children. Still, I don't feel comfortable defending the excesses of manga and anime. And I especially worry about the impact of the "Lolita Complex" material on Western audiences.

Prior to the Eighties, most erotic manga featured relatively mature women: neighbour's wives, female office workers, buxom blonde foreigners, that sort of thing. High school girls in sailor suits were a staple male fantasy, but even they were depicted rather realistically. Somewhere in the early Eighties, though, manga began to eroticise much younger girls. The zany peak of this arguably came when Aki Uchiyama drew eroticised infants in diapers in the popular (and normally reputable) boys weekly *Shonen Magazine*. The reasons are complex, but certainly included a reaction to the time's rigid censorship code (which forbade the depiction of pubic hair and encouraged artists to draw naked girls very young by default), a national obsession with all things "cute", and a growing population of shy and socially autistic males.

Crackdowns on media sex and violence occur periodically in Japan, and extreme "kiddie porn" materials are not ignored. As recently as last December, a porn site operator was arrested on suspicion of selling CDs containing child pornography. Even so, there are considerable differences between what is tolerated in Japan and the West. In Japan, manga and anime for young people often show children naked, and use an innocent gag-eroticism such as skirt-lifting, or small boys showing their genitals. In erotic manga for both men and women, it is not uncommon to see adults seducing minors. In fact, a substantial number of the June genre (gay male romances for women) are about prepubescent boys being ravished by older men. Nor is this toleration of what is taboo in many countries limited to the media. In Tokyo, a law against men having sex with minors was only passed last year, and until then they faced no criminal charges. It passed partly in response to an explosion in *enjo kosai*, or "subsidised dating" in which schoolgirls had liaisons with older men for money or gifts.

I take a rather libertarian stance on sex and violence in fantasy-based media, as long as it doesn't spill over into real life. People aren't social automatons who automatically translate what they see or read into action; if that were the case American comic fans would have all donned capes and jumped from tall buildings years ago.

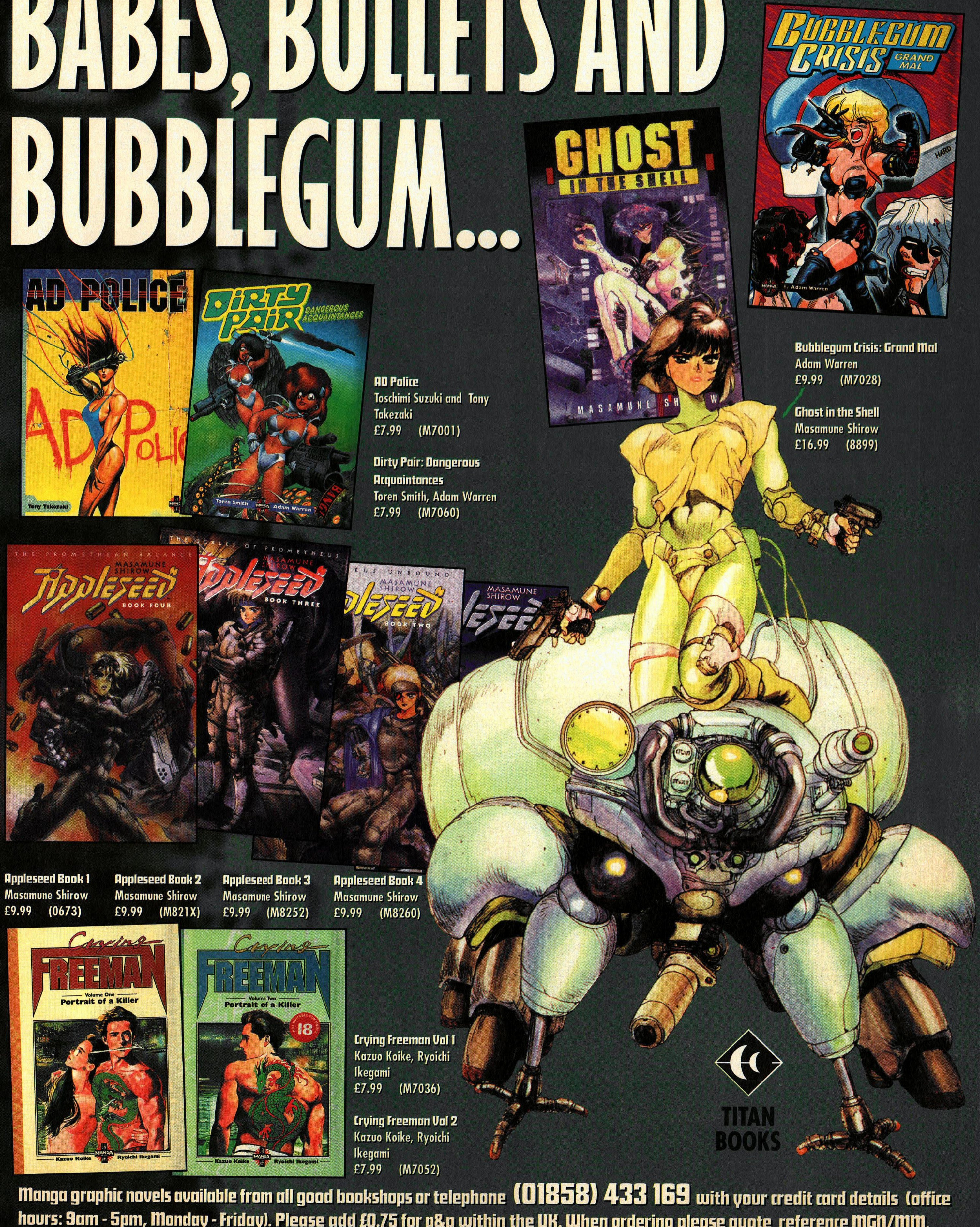
The problem is that while we live in an increasingly "globalised" world, there are still profound differences in culture and in the way things can be interpreted. In the United States, a 21-year old woman can be charged with rape and jailed for seducing a 16-year old boy (one of my fantasies as a teenager!). Similarly, manga and anime with innocent child nudity can be regarded as child pornography. It's one reason that Western distributors regularly excise problem scenes from manga and anime, and change scripts to raise the ages of characters in erotic scenes to the legal limits.

The point is, that although we fans are tempted to defend all manga and anime, doing so is not a good idea. Cute girls, mecha and action scenes may be part of the reason anime is so popular in the West, and there's nothing wrong with that, but there are grave risks associated with some of the more extreme material. For the health of the fan community and the Western industry, we are better off being honest about the problems in anime and manga, and recognising that not all cultural differences are going to be accepted; nor should they be. ●

Frederik L. Schodt (www.jai2.com) is a writer, translator, and interpreter based in San Francisco. He has written several books on Japan, including *America & the Four Japans* and *Dreamland Japan: Writings on Modern Manga*.

Cream Lemon (Ami Graffiti) © Fairy Dust/Soeishinsha

BABES, BULLETS AND BUBBLEGUM...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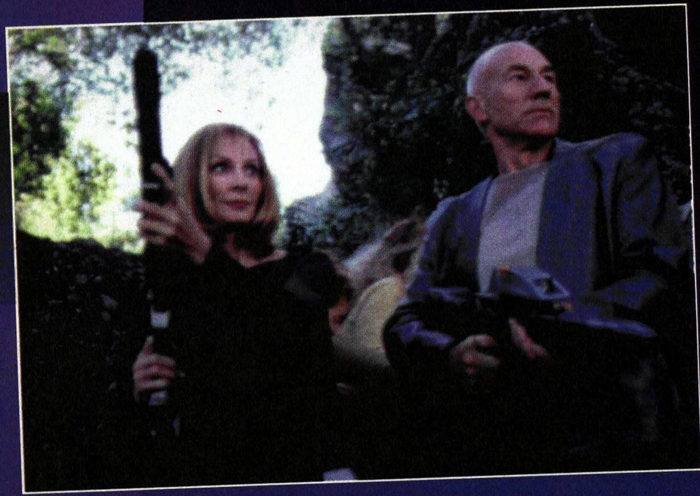

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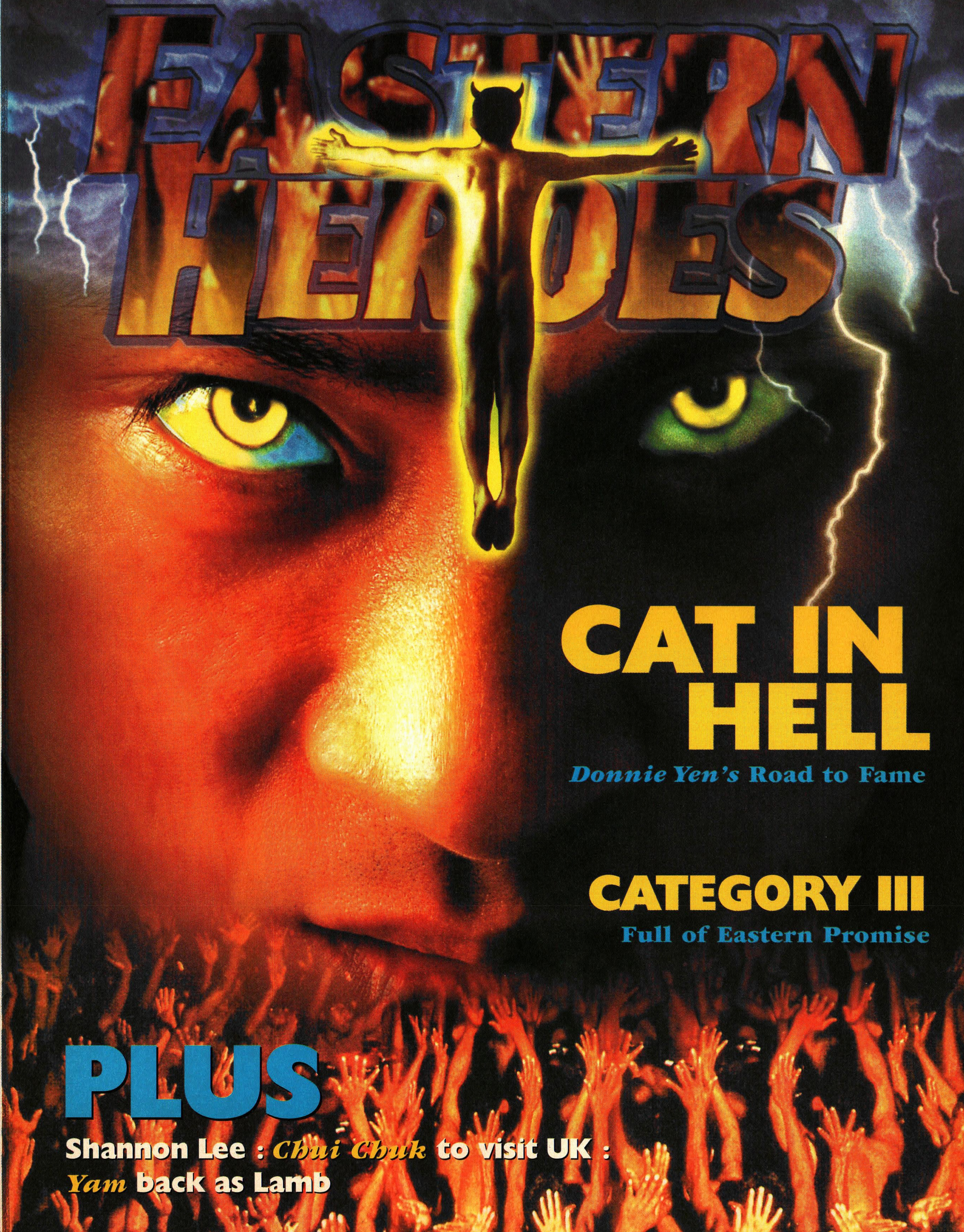
EASTERN HEROES



CAT IN HELL

Donnie Yen's Road to Fame

CATEGORY III

Full of Eastern Promise

PLUS

Shannon Lee : *Chui Chuk* to visit UK :
***Yam* back as Lamb**

Editor
Rick Baker

Contributors
Ting Wai Ho, Bey Logan (HK), Toby Russell, Brian White (UK), MC Thomason (Aus.), Steve Tartalia (US), Julien Fonfrede (Canada)

Special Thanks To:
John Woo, Media Asia, Chinastar, Filmswell, Anthony Wong, Golden Harvest

英雄東方

EASTERN *Heroes*

With the biggest annual cinema attendance, the upcoming Chinese New Year is a crucial time for the Hong Kong studios. Throughout the Nineties the New Year line-up has been pretty much the same, with the four kings of HK cinema (Chow Yun-Fat, Jet Lee, Chow Sing-Chi and of course Jackie Chan) taking their latest flick to the audience in a battle of the box office. But the 1999 Chinese New Year for 99 will probably only see Jackie and Chow Sing-Chi doing their bit for the Chinese film industry.

Box office ratings have dropped quite dramatically in the past two years, largely due to video piracy. The CDV (compact digital video) is very cheap and finds its way onto the market stalls within days of a cinematic release.

If the Hong Kong film industry is to survive then it has to make its future productions more marketable to the West. *Storm Riders* beat Jackie Chan's *Who Am I?* but failed to come close to the number-one slot *Titanic*. That took over $HK 100 million proving that if a film has legs, then there is an audience still out there in HK to support it.

But my gut feeling tells me that there may be a few surprise films that will help kickstart the flagging interest and maybe, just maybe, as we approach the Millennium we might discover a few new and badly needed HK Action stars to give new blood to the industry. Only time will tell.

Rick Baker

RICK'S *Round-up* 99

Bang You're Dead

Like her late brother Brandon, Shannon Lee (Heung Yi) was reluctant to follow in her famous father Bruce's footsteps as a martial arts action star. But after several dubious film starts including *Caged Heat 2*, she seems to have found her level with her latest release from Golden Harvest. The movie started life as *Enter the Phoenix* (as in the female counterpart of the Dragon), but after threats from Warner Brothers it was retitled *Bang You're Dead*, which doesn't have quite the same ring to it. But in the Hong Kong territory, the name was changed again to Enter the Eagle – sounds like law suit time again ●

Shannon Lee brandishes her famous father's trade mark nunchaku in training for Enter The Eagle

Jet, Michelle Film... Rumours denied

Jet and Michelle to rekindle their onscreen relationship in a swordplay epic?

One hot rumour, circulating from certain Taiwan sources, is that Jet Li and Michelle Yeoh are to make a film together for Ang Lee. The Taiwanese director had announced at the Taiwan film festival that in 1999 he would start production on an epic sword-play film entitled *Lying Tiger Hiding Dragon*. But he denied any rumours that he was going to rekindle the onscreen chemistry between Li and Yeoh as seen in the Yuen Woo-Ping classic *Tai Chi Master*. According to Wins Films, Li is still contractually obliged to make one more film for them, and an Ang Lee project with Yeoh was certainly under discussion several months ago. Obviously this would be a difficult task for anyone to pull off after both actors have tasted Hollywood temptation, and both are probably reluctant to put their careers on hold to make another HK movie. Still if by some miracle they do pull it off, it'll be good news for all HK film fans who want just once more chance to see the stars in the sort of movie that made them famous in the first place. Although if directed by the man who gave us *Sense & Sensibility*, it might be a bit posh. ●

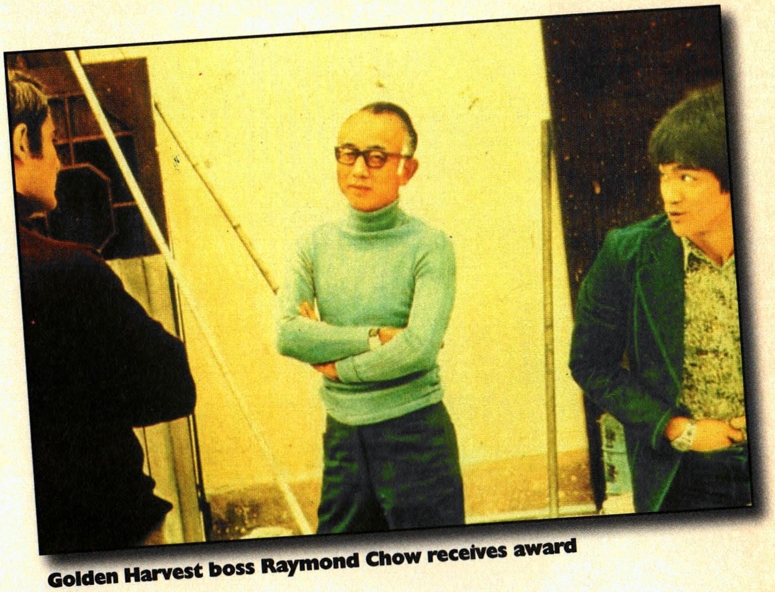
Jet Li PRODIGY TO COME TO UK

With Jet Li pursuing a Hollywood career, the HK market is in desperate need for someone to fill his shoes. Enter Chui Chuk who has already taken over Li's role in the *Once Upon a Time* series. In July I arranged for Chui to fly to Montreal film festival for a screening of his latest movie *Black Sheep Affair* which went down a storm with the sell-out audiance.

Although harden HK film fans will already be familiar with his work, (*The Blade*, *Mah-jong Dragon*) Chui still has no real market value in the West. So following the success of Montreal, we will be doing a special film festival in London with Chui doing a Q&A, signing posters and hopefully some kung fu on stage.

There will be more info on this via our web site and we will be doing a special piece on Chui Chuk in an upcoming issue. ◆

Chiu Chuk on stage at Montreal, after an impressive screening of Black Sheep Affair

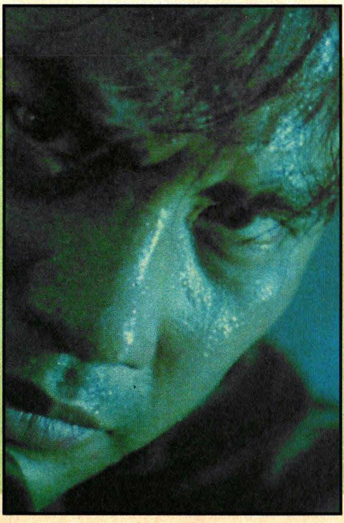


Golden Harvest boss Raymond Chow receives award

Award for *Raymond*

Golden Harvest Chief Raymond Chow has been awarded the Golden Bauhinia for his hard work on behalf of the Hong Kong film industry. It's been a funny year for Harvest, who decided it was time to move on after failing to get its lease contract renewed after 30 years. Apparently the goverment want to turn the lot into real estate, which is quite sad as it was always been a great landmark to visit when in HK.

Jackie Chan resigned from his position as a non executive board member. He will now buy a stake in Media Asia, the company that produced his last two documentries *My Story* and *My Stunts.*
He will also star in the up and coming *Police Story* television series. After flagging box office with most of their recent movies Harvest had a spectacular hit with *Storm Riders.* The future of Golden Harvest may look a little shaky right now, but there is hope that their HK $50 million new production *Chinese Hero* starring Yuen Biao, will have a similar box office success. Full set report on that movie coming soon. ◆



In Brief

Simon Yam is said to be reviving his most notorious role as *Dr Lamb* in a new remake. Despite the quiet film market in HK, investors are still hopeful that you cannot keep a good horror film down, after the success of films like *Scream*.

Chow Yun-Fat recently filmed a new commercial in HK for smart tone mobile phones. The promo was directed by Gordon *(Fist of Legends)* Chan and shot by Arthur*(Knock Off)* Wong. Chow dons his *Better Tomorrow*-style clothing, but this time with a phone in his hand, not a Beretta.

John Woo has begun looking for locations in Australia for *Mission Impossible 2* . He is rumoured to have been impressed with Chow Yun-Fat's performance in *The Corrupter* Steven Seagal was spotted with Cat III Queen Pang Dang in Hong Kong (although newspaper reports had Seagal denying any link, other than she was hustling for a part) . Seagal is looking to shoot his next film project in the former British territory and to use some of the local talent to bring life to his fight scenes. ◆

Despite legions of fans all around the world, Donnie Yen still struggles, after 14 years of dedicated effort in some 24 movies, to establish himself as a key player in his turbulent, fad-driven home territory – the Hong Kong market. *Brian White* investigates.

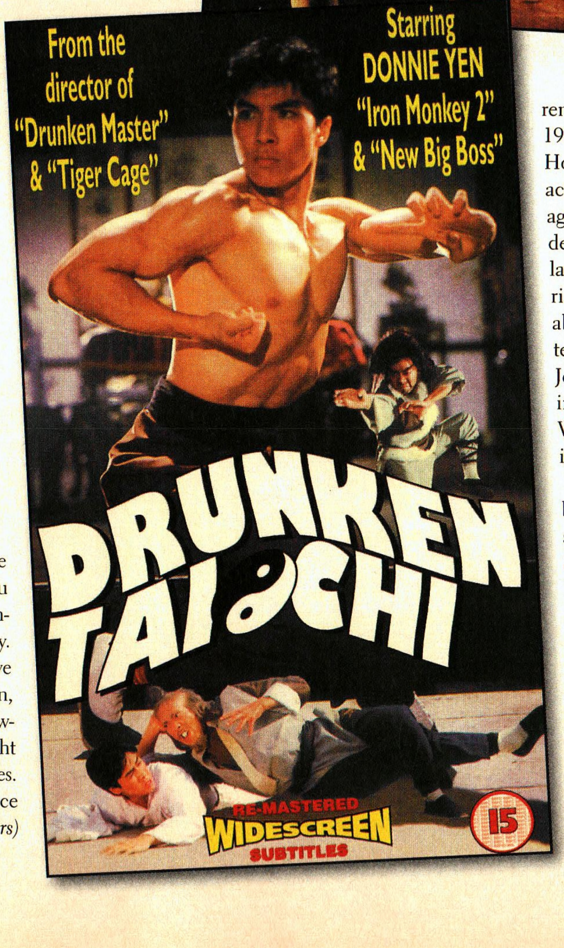
DONNIE YEN: The New Big Boss

On the face of it, it would seem that Donnie Yen (Yen Ji Dan) has the right background to follow in the footsteps of his idol Bruce Lee. He is genuine martial artist, with years of expert tuition and rigorous training. Born in Boston in 1966, Donnie trained at a very early age with his mother Bow Sim Mark, a renowned master of Tai Chi Chuan and Pa Kua Chang, who was twice awarded the coveted Woman of the Year award by *Inside Kung Fu* magazine.

At the age of 16, and already a capable martial artist, Donnie was sent to China for three years to study the complex and exacting art of Wu Shu; and in another curious parallel with the early life of Bruce Lee, to escape the influence of Triad-style gangs in downtown Boston.

During his first year in Beijing, where Donnie trained for up to eight hours a day alongside future mega-star Jet Li, his efforts were recognised by *Inside Kung Fu* magazine, who voted him Martial Artist of the Year in 1982 in spite of some very stiff competition. Suitably inspired, Donnie went to Hong Kong in 1984, for some well-earned R&R and a chance to audition for director Yuen Woo-Ping, the man who had launched the career of Jackie Chan some years earlier, with ground-breaking classics *Snake in the Eagle's Shadow* and *Drunken Master*. Yuen was so impressed with Donnie's fighting skills on the set of *Miracle Fighters II*, that he offered him a multi-picture deal there and then, kicking off with 1984's *Drunken Tai Chi*.

This page clockwise: Donnie Yen takes flight in Satan's Return; the ultimate battle Donnie vs Jet in Once upon a Time in China II; one of the videos available in the UK starring Donnie Yen.


From the director of "Drunken Master" & "Tiger Cage"
Starring DONNIE YEN "Iron Monkey 2" & "New Big Boss"
DRUNKEN TAI CHI
RE-MASTERED
WIDESCREEN
SUBTITLES
15

"Despite a hysterically convoluted plot, that could have been created in haste on the back of a napkin, *Drunken Tai Chi* has steadily amassed a strong following in many parts of the world..."

Drunken Tai Chi is an impressive film. Like *Drunken Master* before it, it is a non-stop kung fu comedy featuring remarkable choreography, eccentric characters and dynamic, lucid cinematography. Despite a hysterically convoluted plot, that could have been created in haste on the back of a napkin, *Drunken Tai Chi* has steadily amassed a strong following in many parts of the world, due to its awesome fight footage and Donnie Yen's amazing physical abilities. In particular, his clashes with veteran kung fu ace Wong *(Secret Rivals)* Tao and Yuen *(Miracle Fighters)* Hsin-Yee are certified classics.

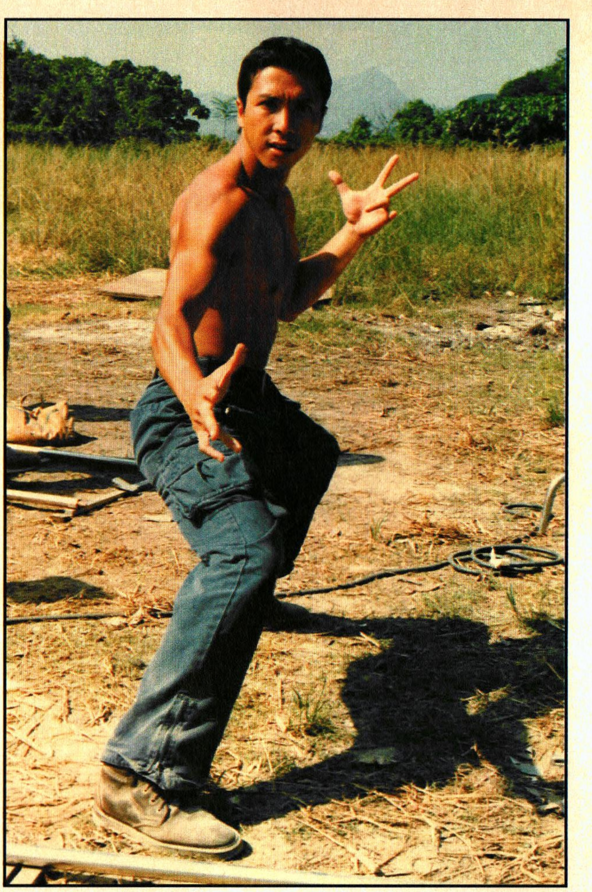
But all too soon, the honeymoon was over, when *Mismatched Couples*, Donnie's second feature as principal lead, turned out to be a box office bomb. Since this early failure, Donnie's hopes for stardom have been continually dashed by the Hong Kong movie-going public, whose criteria for an enjoyable action-adventure frequently defies explanation.

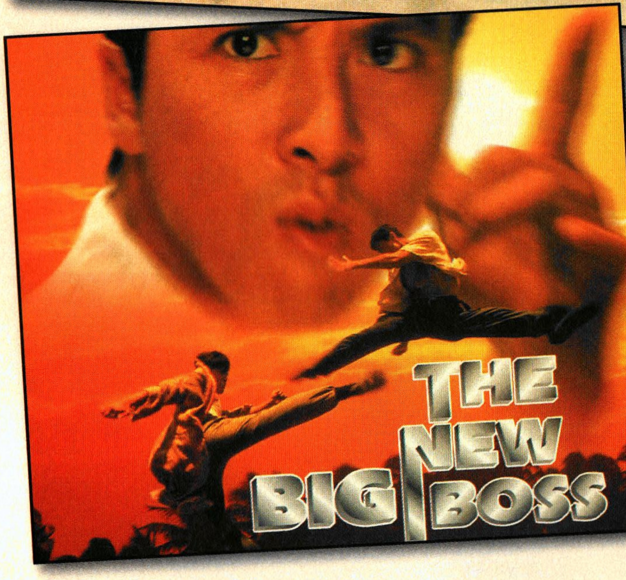
Admittedly, *Mismatched Couples* truly deserved to sink without a trace, but the 1989 adrenaline-pumping *Witness* (a.k.a *In the Line of Duty IV*) was received with open arms by excited foreign fans. Its release in a few Western territories showcased scene after scene of breath-taking action, all captured beautifully by the flawless camera-work of Yuen Woo-Ping. It culminates in a remarkable roof-top battle, during which Donnie combines Wu-Shu-style kicking, grappling and combinations from Western boxing, to overcome the brute strength of long-time friend and ex-Navy Seal, Michael Woods.

But while Western fans were wearing out the heads on their VCRs playing back their favourite fight-scenes, the HK cinema-goers remained apathetic. Refusing to accept defeat, in 1990 Donnie delivered what many fans outside of Hong Kong believe to be one of the best Asian action-adventures ever made with *Tiger Cage II*, again in collaboration with Yuen. After minimal deference to plot structure protocol, *Tiger Cage II* launches the viewer into an irrepressible thrill-ride, that demands repeated viewing to fully absorb the spectacle. However, despite the mastery on display in his stunning katana duel with John Salvitti, or the awesome combination kicking in his unique encounter with Michael Woods, when it came to box-office performance in Hong Kong, *Tiger Cage II* was another flop.

Between 1991 and 1994, with his lack of big-screen credibility now a major obstacle to securing the finance for a reasonable vehicle, Donnie became a household name on Hong Kong's lucrative television networks, playing characters as diverse as Chan Jun in the highly entertaining *Fist of Fury* series for ATV, and Hung Shi Kwan in the Jet Li-inspired *New Legend of Shaolin*.

To keep his name in film circles, Donnie also secured principal roles in low-budget action-fests like *Crystal Hunt*, *Cheetah on Fire* and *Circus Kids*, as well as prestigious supporting parts in A-grade projects, most notably alongside Jet Li in *Once Upon a Time in*





This page clockwise: Donnie Yen in New Dragon Gate Inn; Donnie strikes a pose; Donnie brings 'little dragon' Bruce Lee back to life.

China II(1991). Under the experienced eye of director Tsui Hark, Donnie turned in a controlled and emotionally charged performance as a tyrannical Chinese Imperial Adjutant, surprising many of his critics. Here, for the first time Donnie's projected physicality during the battle scenes actually reflects his character's true sense of purpose. The ferocity and precision with which he tests the skill of Jet Li's Wong Fei Hung in a blistering Shaolin pole duel is a deliberate physical expression of his character's mentality, expertly conveyed through emotion and gesture during Donnie's time on screen.

Donnie's potential as an actor is further unveiled by director Li Hui-Min in the Tsui Hark-produced *New Dragon Gate Inn.* In a truly tense, claustrophobic, and emotionally frenzied epic centring on the balance of power between Eunuchs and Imperial Forces in feudal China, Donnie excels as despotic Head-Eunuch Chao Shao-qin, a man so driven by greed and ambition, that he is completely blind to compassion or tolerance.

> **"... he received excellent exposure in a number of Japanese magazines prior to the movie's release, and it was distributors in Japan who dubbed him the 'New Big Boss' on the cinema poster. "**

In a brilliantly dark and forceful performance, Donnie contributes immeasurably to the mounting suspense, as his character pulls those who oppose him into a web that can only lead to final and deadly conflict. The exaggerated, hyperviolent and wildy kinetic sword fight between Chao Shao-qin and the characters played by Leung Kar Fai, Brigitte Lin, and Maggie Cheung at the movie's climax, is the only possible combative expression of the hatred and revenge that threatened to consume them all during the unfolding of the drama, and once again Donnie's physical contribution is exceptional.

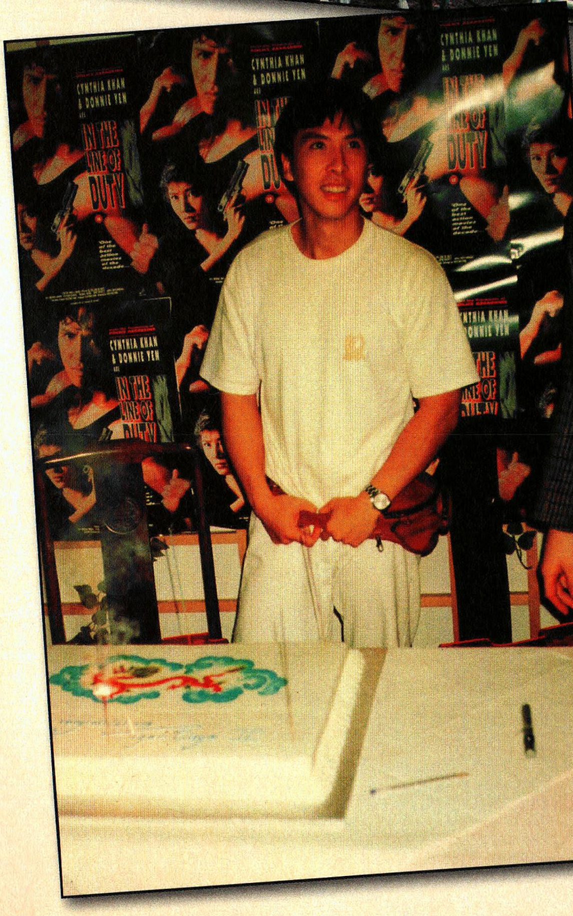
While endearing himself further to Western audiences with superb martial artistry in the 1993 features *Butterfly & Sword*, *Iron Monkey* and *Hero Amongst Heroes*, Donnie still made only moderate steps towards raising his personal profile with Hong Kong audiences. Instead of accepting the villain's role in Jackie Chan's landmark *Drunken Master II* (which could have been his *big* break), he took parts in a couple of films that did not do him justice. In *High Voltage* (1995), a cop drama with poor story structure and production values on a level with stag-night camcorder footage, Donnie would have needed to tap-dance with Moses to make an impact.

In the *Se7en*-inspired *Satan Returns* (1996), Donnie's acting is certainly above par, but his momentum dissipates very quickly amidst a series of predictable horror movie cliches, blue filters, tilted angles, and the over-usage of low wattage lights and smoke effects. As an added 'bonus', Chingamy Yau gives a lamentable performance as the 'daughter of Satan', and the revelation of her character's significance to the story is no surprise.

In a bold decision to take more control over his own destiny, Donnie set up his own production company for his 1997 directorial debut *New Big Boss* (aka *Legend of the Wolf*). Although hampered by an extraneous framing story and occasionally overplayed drama, *New Big Boss* is still a surprisingly powerful and exhilarating bare-knuckle action movie, which does much to establish the credentials of Donnie Yen as a director/producer. Based loosely on the Bruce Lee classic, the movie depicts a legendary fighter (the titular Wolf), in a series of hypnotic flashback sequences. Although based on an amnesia theme, which also featured in Jackie Chan's *Who am I?* and Jet Li's *Once Upon a Time in China & America*, released around the same time, it is a surprisingly compelling story of a legendary fighter wandering through a desolate and hostile land, in search of the village which promises reunion with his long-lost love (Carmen Lee). There is also some truly vibrant, dazzling martial artistry on display, which, although reminiscent of the stylised combat of Tsui Hark's *The Blade*, also evokes the surreal intensity of anime in its direct and brutal execution. The irrepressible force of nature, which frames almost every fight scene, is a powerful reflection of the unremitting passion and determination which burns in the heart of every true fighter, and contributes significantly to the overall artistic impact of the movie.

In Japan, where Donnie is very popular due to exported television serials such as *Fist of Fury*, he received excellent exposure in a number of Japanese magazines prior to the movie's release, and it was distributors in Japan who dubbed him the "New Big Boss" on the cinema poster. But at home in Hong Kong it was the same old story, with *New Big Boss* running for a mere three days at the box-office. ●

This page anticlockwise: Donnie checks out the rushes for New Big Boss; Donnie receives a cake from Rick Baker in the UK for completion of Tiger Cage II; Donnie Yen looks on as he directs New Big Boss



THINGS TO COME

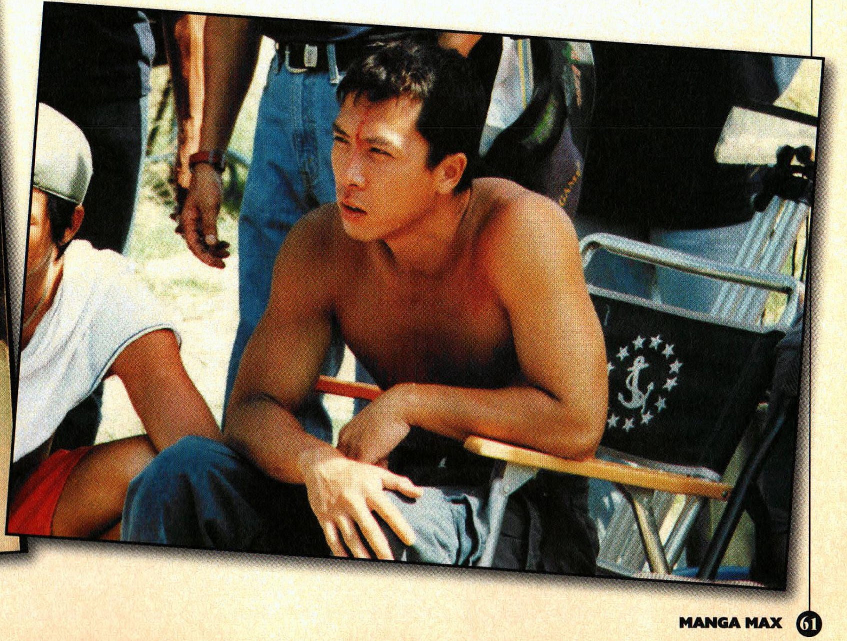
With the recent migration of such Hong Kong action giants as Jackie Chan, Jet Li, Chow Yun Fat and Sammo Hung to the bright lights of Hollywood, one would have thought that genuinely talented martial arts performers such as Donnie and Zhao Wen Zhau, would have been able to make an impact in the absence of more established competition. In Hong Kong however, audiences obviously do not regard Donnie as a viable leading man, and this is reflected in their consistent lack of support for his movies. The appeal of the traditional action movie has diminished in recent years, and US films have begun to dominate the HK box-office. Donnie has suffered badly, as his most appreciative audience now resides on the other side of the world.

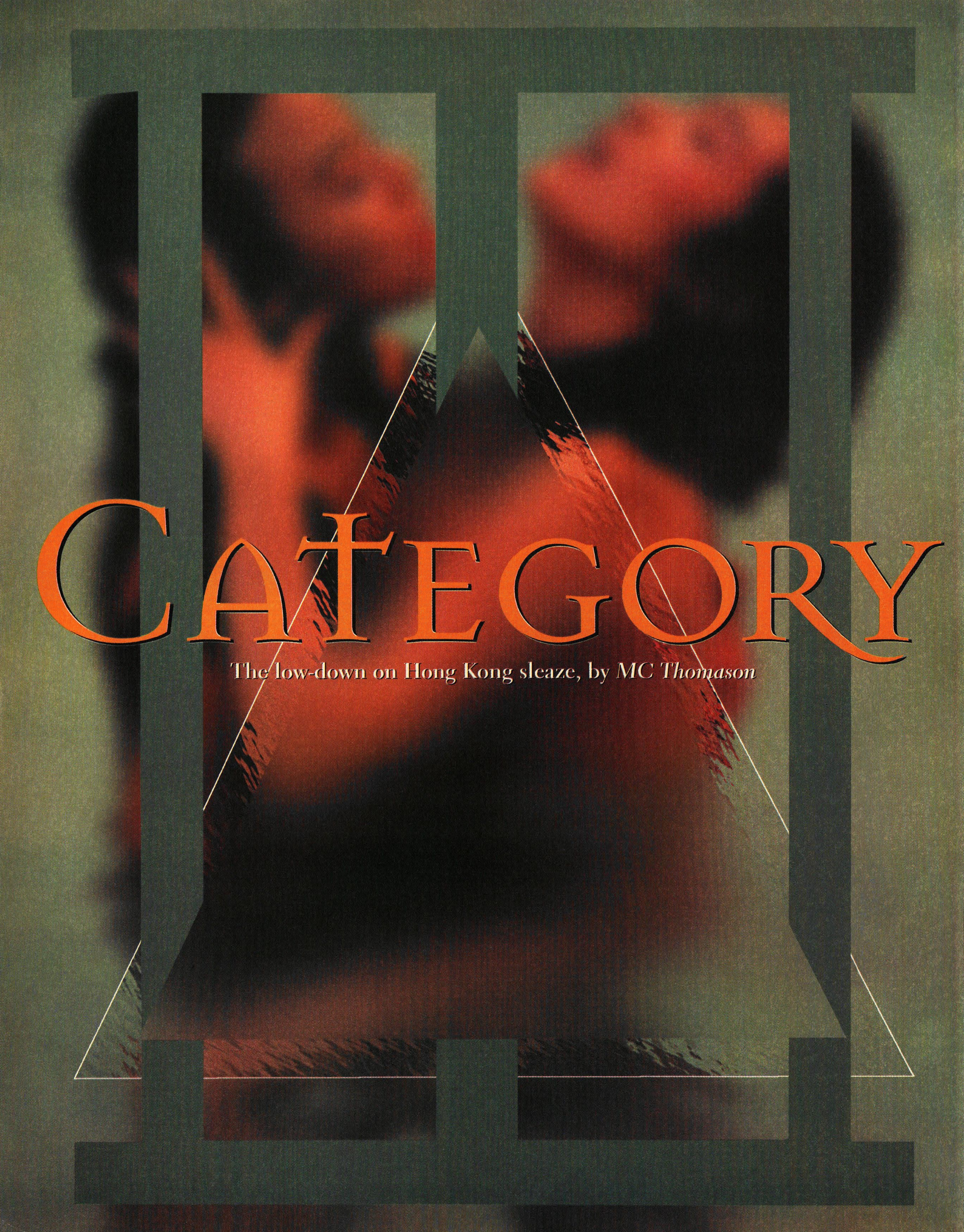
"Aaron Kwok may be as menacing as a bubble-wrapped hamster, but with a handful of stunt-doubles and some clever editing and camera-work, studios can make him into a semi-believable action-hero..."

In a territory where image-obsessed Hong Kong teenagers make up the most significant portion of the cinema audience, producers often consider Cantonese pop idols as more marketable candidates for action leads than those with real fighting prowess. Aaron Kwok may be as menacing as a bubble-wrapped hamster, but with a handful of stunt-doubles and some clever editing and camera-work, studios can make him into a semi-believable action-hero, who puts 'bums on seats'.

For Donnie to compete successfully with this institutionalised mentality, and really fulfil his potential, I feel he needs a complete change of direction. At the press-conference for *New Big Boss* in 1997, he said "I hope to make a film with full English dialogue, like William Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, I have already decided on a title and plan to ask Annie Wu (Ng Sun Kwan) to be the star. Her youthful spirit makes her very appropriate for this kind of role."

Personally, I feel this is the last project he should pursue at this stage of his career, as it would undoubtedly receive the same poor reception as his recent *Ballistic Kiss* (1998), an over-stylised action-drama with Donnie as an unconvincing romantic lead. Donnie should postpone projects of this kind and work instead with more established directors in higher profile productions, where his talents can be more effectively illustrated. Although I admire his independent thinking and ambition, I feel that by trying to direct, produce and finance his own movies, Donnie is really making obstacles to his own progress, at a time when market conditions are not favourable to small production companies. Hopefully in the near future, Donnie can find a direction in his career that will lead him to the break he so desperately needs, because when the Hong Kong movie industry is your springboard to international success, you've got to learn to jump pretty high. ●





CATEGORY III

The low-down on Hong Kong sleaze, by *MC Thomason*

Often mistaken as a sub-genre of Hong Kong cinema itself, a Category III film is actually little more than a motion picture that has been awarded Hong Kong's top censorship classification. Hong Kong dabbled in soft core pornography, and graphic violence, in much of its output throughout the Seventies, but it wasn't until the late Eighties that a uniform censorship classification was introduced.

A three-tiered system was introduced to the (then) Crown Colony in November 1988. The three classifications were as follows:

a) Category I – Suitable for All Ages.
b) Category II – Not Suitable for Children
c) Category III – 18 and Over Only.

The Category III was introduced to allow more adult film-making back into Hong Kong cinemas. It is generally accepted that Taylor Wong's brutally realistic 1989 thriller *Sentenced To Hang* was the first Hong Kong film to be awarded the Category III classification, although some sources quote the Andy Lau drama *Runaway Blues*. Not unexpectedly, the new censorship classification not only allowed new freedom in the on-screen depiction of nudity, sexuality, and explicit violence, but opened the floodgates for a fast-growing wave of exploitation film-makers. Adult films had arrived full strength in Hong Kong cinemas.

Over the years, Hong Kong has remained the last great bastion of sexploitation cinema, a trend that seems to have died out in the West with the tail end of the *Emmanuelle* films and the Brass/Guccione *Caligula*. Michael Mak's *Sex & Zen* (1991) and Clarence Ford's *Naked Killer* (1992) delighted and amazed international film audiences world-wide, winning cult followings throughout the West. In the early Nineties a new breed, the Category III true-crime thriller, sprang up in Hong Kong and was quick to find Western favour with its brutally graphic depictions of real-life crimes (the censor-plagued *Doctor Lamb* and *The Untold Story* being the best of these).

Even today, with Hong Kong handed back to Chinese rule, the Category III film continues to flourish. Pushing the boundaries of what would be accepted in Western film, Hong Kong Category III cinema continues to amaze audiences, and cause censors headaches, in most English-speaking territories of the world.

Top: A femme fatale from Dances With Snakes; Above: Dr Lamb

Category III Classics

Erotic Ghost Story 1-4 (1990-97) Directed by Nam Ngai Choi, Peter Ngor, Ivan Lai & Lam Yi Hung. Based on a series of erotic Chinese folktales, and produced by the esteemed Hong Kong production house Golden Harvest. Made an overnight sensation out of its 36DD star, former model and July 1989 Hong Kong *Playboy* Playmate, Amy Yip.

Sex & Zen I-III (1991-98) Directed by Michael Mak, Chin Man Kei & Cheung Man. Hong Kong's most famous soft core sex romp. Again toplining Amy Yip, and based on the *The Carnal Prayer Mat*, a sex manual banned for over 400 years. The 1996 sequel introduced Taiwanese sex kitten Hsu Chi to Category III audiences. Part three, produced by Wong Jing, made its Hong Kong debut in 1998. Part 1, originally trimmed of six minutes of footage for Australian release, was later released uncut.

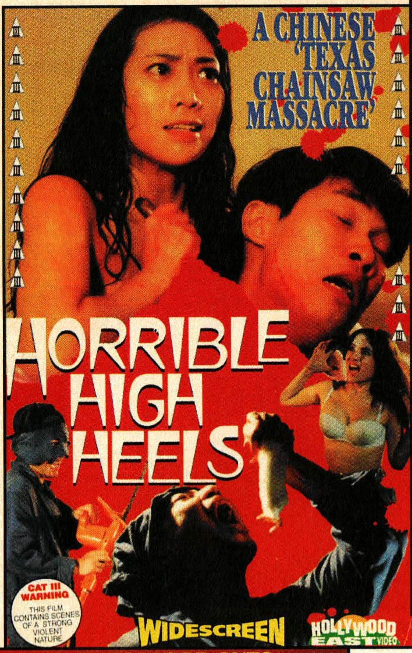
Naked Killer (1992) Directed by Clarence Ford (Fok Yiu Leung). One of the all-time Category III classics, loved by audiences worldwide. Chingamy Yau is a hit-woman, Carrie Ng her nemesis, and Simon Yam the cop on their tails(!). Sometimes a case of style over content, but stunning to watch, and decidedly sexy to boot. A deft combination of action, soft core sex and gorgeous imagery. Passed uncut in the US, UK and Australia.

Robotrix (1992) Directed by Jamie Luk. A Category III spin on the *Bionic Woman* (times three). Stars Amy Yip as the 36DD robot with the most, and Billy *(Fist Of Legend)* Chow as a flipped-out cyborg rapist. Has had censorship troubles in every territory it has been released in outside of Hong Kong (where it was passed uncut). Passed with an 'R' rating in Australia after all of the rape scenes and a bit of gore were removed. Similarly treated in the UK, but passed uncut in the US. A cheesy soft core sci-fi classic.

Doctor Lamb (1992) Directed by Danny Lee & Billy Tang. Based on the true story of Lam Gor Yu, Hong Kong's taxi-cab killer. Simon Yam is at his over-the-top best. Graphic beyond belief and climaxes with its now-infamous video-taped necrophilia. Originally banned in Australia. Allowed an 'R' classification after 11 minutes were cut. Otherwise unavailable, except in Spain where the cut footage was restored.

The Untold Story (aka: *Bunman*) (1993) Directed by Herman Yau. Another true-crime thriller that shovels on the gore and horror. Anthony Wong plays a notorious Macau serial killer, imprisoned though never actually convicted of his crimes. Appallingly horrific in its uncut form, was cut by over three minutes to gain an R rating in Australia. Unavailable in the UK, but released in the US on a DVD with bonus voice-over.

Run & Kill (1993) Directed by Billy Tang. Unbelievably, yet another true-crime thriller. Kent *(Crime Story)* Cheng plays a businessman who 'accidentally' employs psychopath Simon Yam to rid him of his wife. Graphic violence in spades, and extended scenes of torture (including the pro-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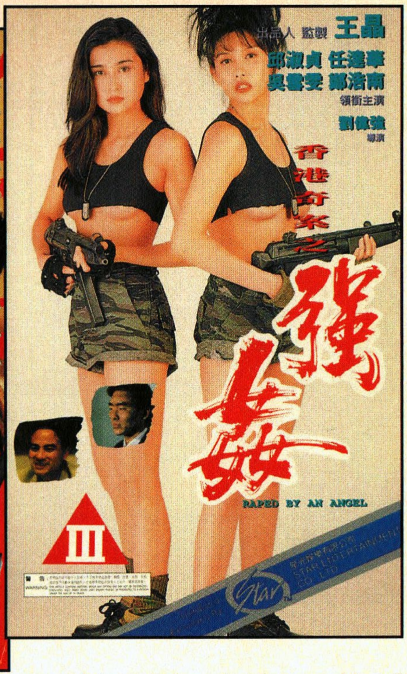

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tracted immolation of a six year old girl) that would prove unsettling for even the toughest of audiences. Never officially released in Australia, or the UK; forthcoming in the US.

Chinese Torture Chamber Story (1994) Directed by Bosco Lam. Producer Wong Jing reinvents the *Sex & Zen* formula for the S&M crowd, with an actual adultery trial case from early Chinese history. Mostly played for laughs, the torture scenes are sometimes gruelling, and the sex even more ridiculous and explicit than its predecessor. Passed uncut in Australia with an 'R' classification! No UK release, cut in the US.

Red To Kill (1995) Directed by Billy Tang. Ben *(City Cop)* Ng plays a serial rapist stalking an occupant of a home for the mentally disabled, the colour red triggering his psychotic episodes. Subject matter alone is disturbing enough, but lengthy rape scenes and a deliriously graphic climax push this one into a class of its own. Quite possibly the strongest, and most offensive, Category III film ever made.

...And Some Unsung Gems

Trilogy of Lust I & II (1994) Directed by Julie Lee & Jiro Ishikawa. One of Hong Kong's first hardcore pornographic features. Basically a Nineties spin on Nagisa Oshima's *In The Realm Of The Senses*. Explicit sex and perversion galore. Followed by a sequel early in 1995. Both films were extensively re-cut for Hong Kong laserdisc and video release.

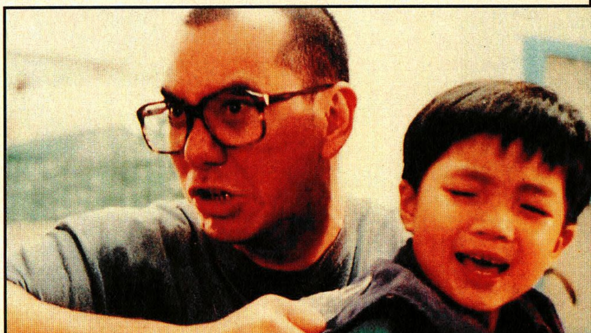
Raped by an Angel (1993) Directed by Andrew Lau. Sold in Singapore as a sequel to *Naked Killer*. Shares much of the same cast. A fairly standard (although sometimes shocking) rape and revenge thriller. Originally banned in Australia. Classified 'R' after extensive re-cutting. Submitted twice to the UK censor and still in the system, currently with nine minutes missing. US version the same as in the US.

Women on the Run (1993) Directed by Corey Yuen & David Lai. An above average action thriller that literally is just 'women on the run'. Features Yuen Jeung, the pint-sized kicker from *Operation Scorpio* (1993). Full of demented naked kung-fu, soft-focus sex, and rampant Hong Kong styled gunfights. A must for the true fans and passed uncut in Australia. Not yet submitted in the UK.

Diary of a Serial Killer (1995) Directed by Otto Chan. A true-life crime thriller based on a series of prostitute murders in Mainland China. Explicit gore, rape scenes, mutilation and necrophilia share screen time with glossily-shot erotica. Hong Kong's answer to *Henry: Portrait Of A Serial Killer* (1987). Originally banned in Australia. Available in the US from Chinatown stores, but not on general release.

Horrible High Heels (1996) Directed by Chou Cheng. Basically a B-grade thriller elevated by some outlandish horror. Story of a serial killer who fashions shoes from women's skin. Rape and graphic gore throughout, and some ghastly bestiality. Cut by 12 minutes for its Australian (Chinese video) release. Releases in the US and Europe uncut, unavailable in the UK.

The Ebola Syndrome (1996) Directed by Herman Yau. Director Yau's follow up to his own *Untold Story*. Anthony Wong is a carrier for the deadly flesh-eating virus Ebola. A 'greatest hits' of Wong's previous films cataloguing rape, graphic violence and child murder. A genuine Category III shocker.



Far Right: Chinese Torture Chamber; Right: Anthony Wong is Bun Man

CATEG

Top left: A Massacre Hong Kong style
Above: New sex siren Diana Pang Dang
Below: All time classic Carrie Ng and Yan in Naked Killers

The Stars Of Category III Cinema

Amy Yip (Yip Chi Mei) Hong Kong's best loved Category III starlet. a former HK *Playboy* centrefold rumoured to possess a 36DD bust. Retired from film in 1993, but announced a return to HK cinema in 1996 that has yet to occur. Category III Highlights: *Sex & Zen, Erotic Ghost Story*.

Veronica Yip (Yip Yuk Hing) Also known as Ronnie Yip. One of the many actresses who got caught up in the Category III circus. Career highpoint could have been *Hardboiled II*, with co-star Tony Leung and director John Woo had not financing fallen through at the last minute. Currently retired from film. Category III Highlights: *Hidden Desire, Pretty Woman, Retribution Sight Unseen, Gigolo* and *Whore II*.

Chingamy Yau (Yau Shuk Ching) A former beauty contest winner born in Japan, gained a huge international following with cult hit *Naked Killer*. The 1993 sequel, *Raped by an Angel*, was not so successful. Crossed over into mainstream film shortly thereafter to great effect, becoming one of HK's most popular actresses. Recently appeared in acclaimed director Stanley Kwan's *Hold You Tight* (1998). Category III Highlights: *Naked Killer, Lover of the Last Empress, Raped by an Angel*.

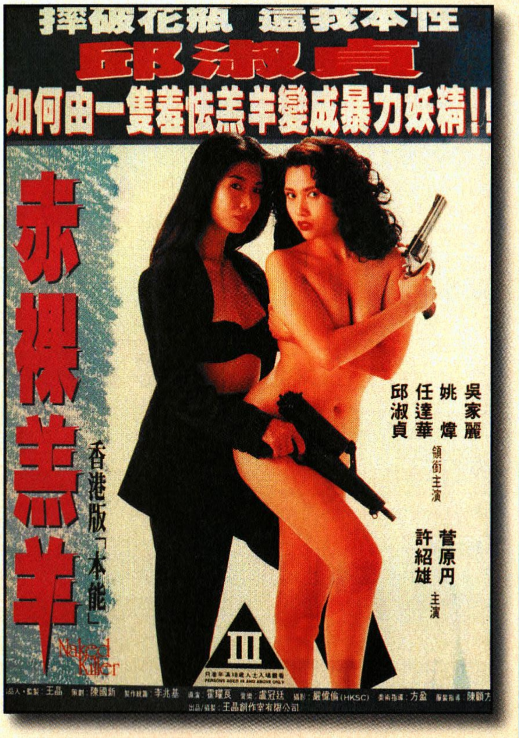
Pauline Chan (Chan Bo Lin) Possibly one of the youngest Category III starlets, entering the business at 16 in 1992. Famous for her 44 inch (outside) legs, retired from Category III films in 1993. Returned to mainstream films after a failed singing career in 1994 with Stephen Chow's James Bond spoof *From Beijing with Love*. Category III Highlights: *Erotic Ghost Story III, Escape From Brothel, Behind the Pink Door*.

Carrie Ng (Ng Kar Lai) A former TV actress who, through persistence, broke into mainstream film, first in bit parts then lead roles. Best remembered performance to date was in *Naked Killer* (1992) as lesbian assassin Princess. Won best actress award for *Remains Of A Woman* (1993). Currently working in mainstream HK films. Category III highlights: *Naked Killer, Remains of a Woman, Evil Instinct*.

Simon Yam (Yam Tat Wah) The son of one of the heads of police in Hong Kong, Simon Yam is a former male model and TVB actor. Made a splash internationally with his lead role as convicted serial killer Lam Gor Yu in *Doctor Lamb*. Still a popular actor in modern HK film. Category III Highlights: *Doctor Lamb, Naked Killer, Tiger of Wanchai, Prince of Portland Street, Day Without Policemen*.

Anthony Wong (Wong Chau Sang) One of Hong Kong's more popular bad boys of Category III film, Wong (a Eurasian of Chinese/German descent) has made a career of playing psychopathic villains. Won best actor at the HK Film Awards for his performance in *The Untold Story* (1993). Also embarked on a singing career in the Heavy Metal field. Ill health slowed his output of during 1997. Best remembered as Johnny in John Woo's *Hardboiled* (1992). Category III Highlights: *Erotic Ghost Story II, The Untold Story, Love to Kill, Ebola Syndrome*.

Elvis Tsui (Tsui Kam Kong) The all-purpose icon of Category III cinema. Immediately recognisable for his looming stature and trademark shaven head and moustache. A strong Category III favourite over the years, but also a popular mainstream actor. Often plays comedy. Has since retired from Category III films and recently launched a career as a painter in early 1998. Category III Highlights: *Sex & Zen, Viva Erotica, Sex & Zen II, Chinese Torture Chamber Story, The Eternal Evil Of Asia*. ●



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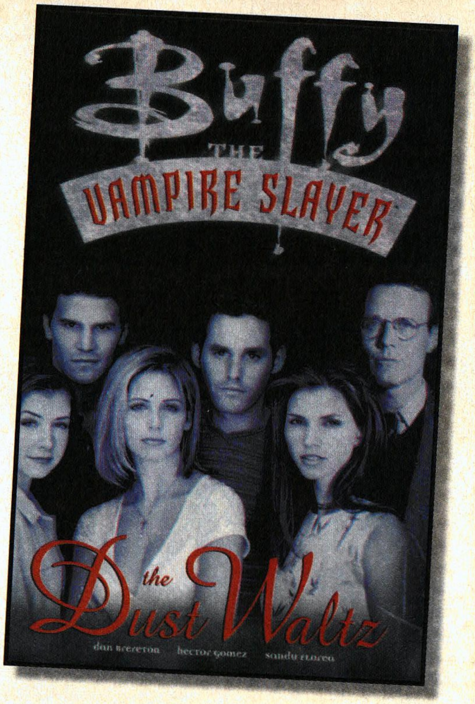
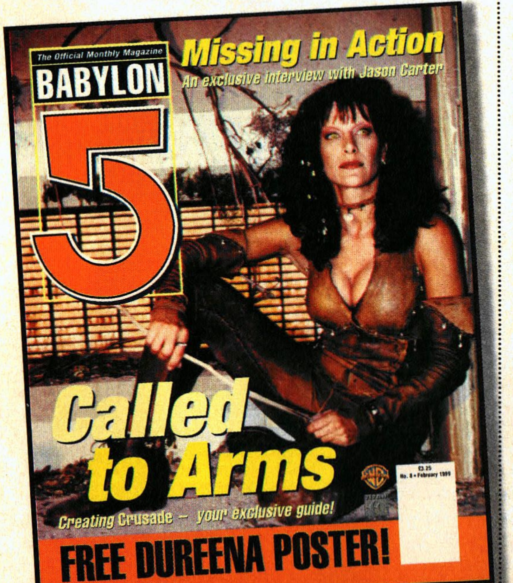
Any *Babylon 5* fan will remember Jason Carter, the actor behind fan-favourite Ranger Marcus Cole. In the latest issue of ***Babylon 5 Magazine***, we stop Carter for a quick chat and find out what life after *Babylon 5* has been like for him. Plus series creator J. Michael Straczynski and SF supremo Harlan Ellison discuss the end of five years of epic story-telling, while we take a detailed peek behind the scenes on the debut of brand new series *The Babylon Project: Crusade*. All this, and a guide to the work of Optic Nerve, the people who create the make-up for the show! ●

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☐ BABYLON 5 MAGAZINE #8
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☐ THE X-FILES MONTHLY #40
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☐ STAR TREK MONTHLY #49
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To order any of these titles, EXCLUDING THE OFFICIAL STAR TREK UK FAN CLUB, ring the nice folks on 01858 433169, quoting the reference TT01/99.

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Coming in MANGA MAX *Issue 3*

We talk to dubbing master **Jack Fletcher**. Helen McCarthy gets **Birdy the Mighty** under her skin. As **Rail of the Star** hits the UK, we examine anime war babies. The original **Godzilla** cast and crew talk about the good old days of rubber stomping. We get into bondage with the **Sorcerer Hunters**. Are anime pirates heroes, or should they **Go to JAILED**? **Shinya Tsukamoto** goes looking for a London iron-mongers, and we survey **Masakazu Katsura's** obsession with all things superheroic.

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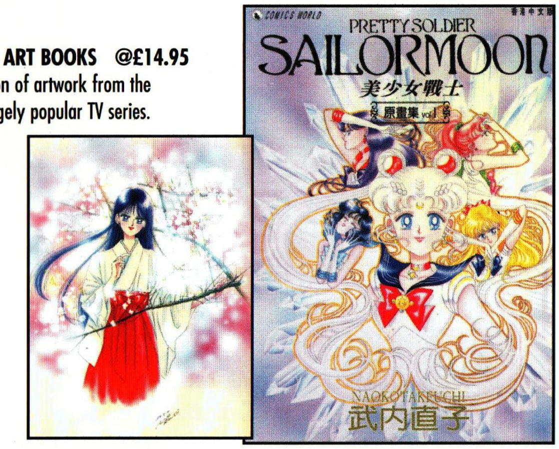

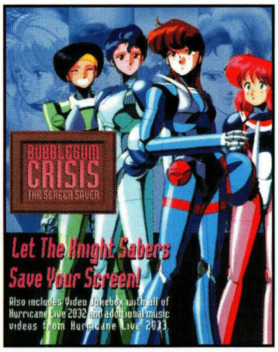
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